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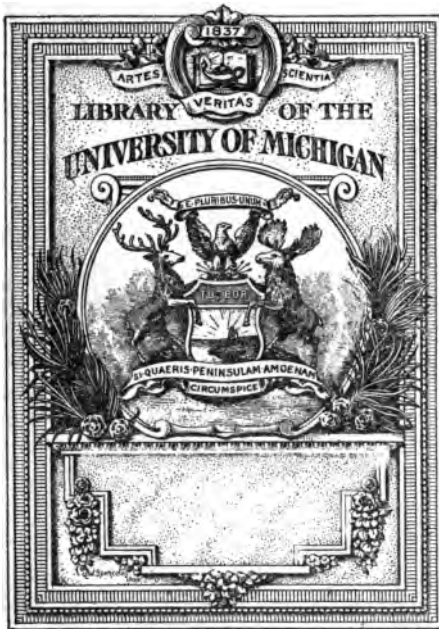
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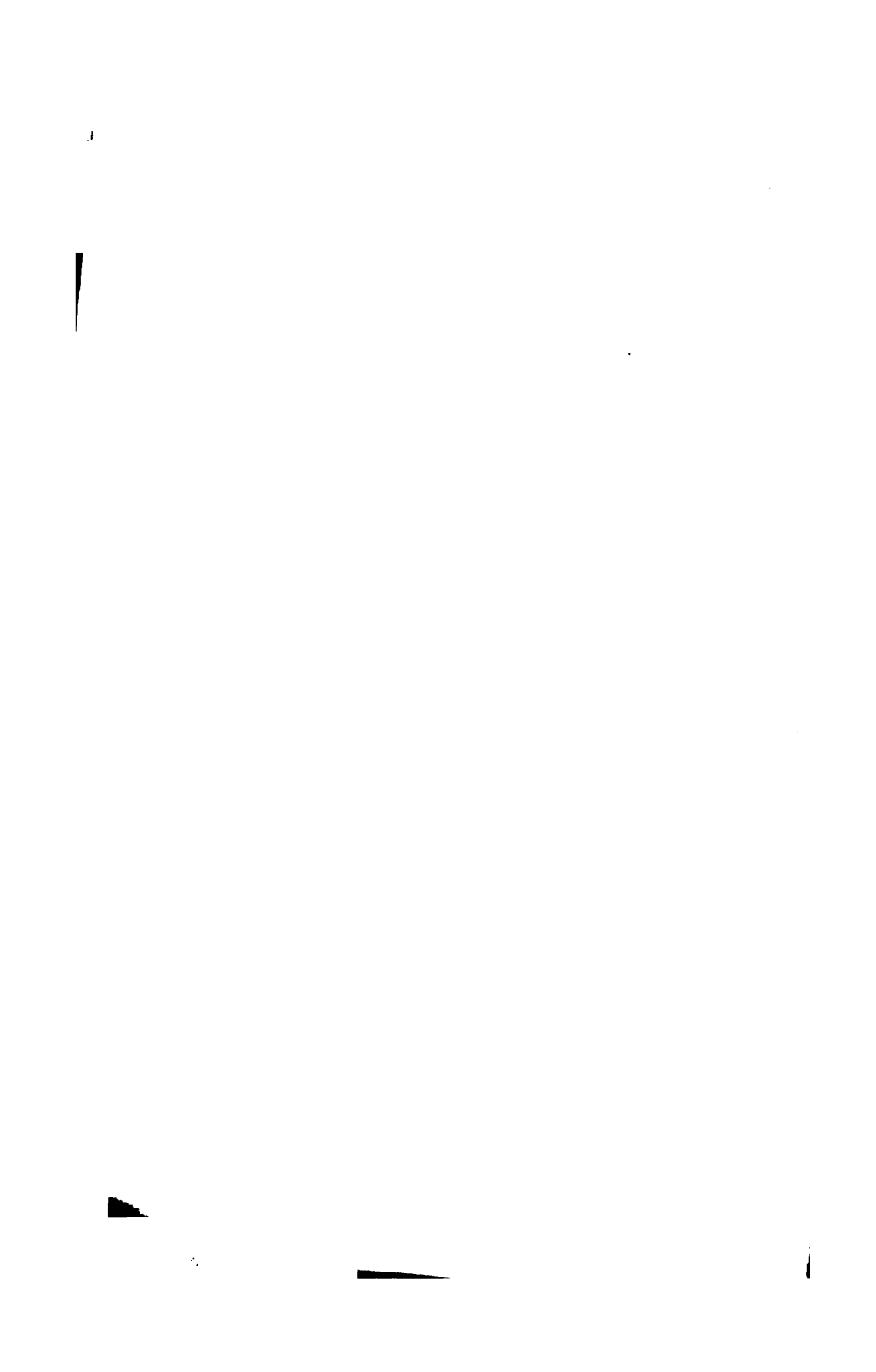
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THE POETRY OF
WILFRID BLUNT





THE POETRY OF
WILFRID^{Scawen} BLUNT

52795

SELECTED AND ARRANGED BY

W. E. HENLEY

AND

GEORGE WYNDHAM



LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1898

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PREFATORY

LET me begin this note by saying that Mr. Wilfrid Blunt is in nowise responsible for this selection from his verse. He has sanctioned its publication, but, left to himself, he would assuredly have included certain numbers which, however interesting in politics, are, as his Editors think, of no special importance as poetry. In fact, the work of choosing lay in other hands than his: so that if it be found that he is ill shown in the choice from his several volumes here presented, the fault is not with him.

That said, as is just, I hasten to add that what follows is excerpted from the work of a poet who, as I deem, has put more of himself and his sole experience into his verse than any writer of his time. More: he writes throughout as one in and of a certain *monde*, as a man about town, a *viveur* (the term is used in no illiberal sense), a country gentleman who is also a person in society; so that his poetry has a savour and an impulse which make it a thing apart in modern verse. He comes, in fact, through Owen Meredith, straight from the Byron of "Don Juan," and to my mind he is far and away the strongest, the most personal, and the most persuasive of the whole descent. No more than the others—no more than Byron even—does

PREFATORY

he present a purely literary interest. True it is that his vocabulary—copious, expressive, ever sufficient, charged with energy and spirit and colour—is that of one who has read his Shakespeare and his Bible and his “Juan,” and in the reading has learned—what some greater poets but worse masters of English have not—that any word is good enough so long as it is the one word wanted. True it is, too, that he writes verse as his mother-tongue: with ease, with power, with a capacity for arresting the attention which, of the whole descent, none since Byron save himself has shown. His poetry, in fact, is poetry in the good sense of the word to me. But then, I also am a lover of life, and I also look on verse as the rarest and the finest medium for the expression of life the wit of man has yet devised; and it may be that I am strongly prepossessed in favour of the poetry presented in this volume for that, whatever its quality as accomplishment, it fairly triumphs as a living piece of life. Against me, I know, is the theory—especially dear to writers of minor verse—that poetry, alike in substance and in essence, is but a lovely mosaic of lovely words. I know that theory—I have done my best at times to practise it; and I confess that, if I gave heed to its most intimate entreaties, I might value the poetry here set forth at something less than I do. In truth, Mr. Blunt, for all his gift, is not a poet in the sense that Shakespeare and Herrick, that Milton and Keats, are poets. There are dissonances in his music—little faults of time and tune: as a cheap rhyme, a strained construction, a piece of dubious syntax. But, when all's said, his verse moves with a sort of natural elegance—a careless, high-bred swing; and there is ever a personal and easy touch of distinction in

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his style. And for his matter: here is a man, who has lived his life through all its possibilities, discovering his results to men and women; a man whose poetry is the sublimation of his own experience of God's universe; a man, in fine, who, being set in a certain *milieu*, has assimilated all of it he could, and has produced his results before the world in terms distinguished enough to make them a lasting contribution to English letters.

This for the reason that his master-quality is truthfulness: that he gives out nothing which he has not seen, or felt, or done, and made his own. The "Esther," the "Quatrains of Youth" (here printed for the first time), the "Proteus" sonnets—these are not mere verses: they are *animæ figura*, the revelation of a peculiar human soul. They are pregnant all—as "Griselda" is, and "Worth Forest," and "The Wanderer's Return"—with poignant sensations and impressions poignantly put. They deal in fresh, clean, living English with life and love, the romance of travel, the delight in woods and fields and skies, the pride of ancestry and race, the joy and the sorrow of being, the terror of decay, the pathos and the cruelty of death—all the elements of mortal destiny as mortal destiny has been revealed to one forceful, passionate, understanding witness. That is their chief strength, and their chief strength is one Time cannot wither nor custom change. It is pleasant enough, no doubt, to wander East of the sun and West of the moon, to dream dreams of Camelot and Astolat, to gossip with first one and then the other half of Rome, and play at Caponsacchi now, and now at the Pope. But a man lives for posterity in proportion as he figures the gestures and sets forth the emotions of

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his own time. There is no sweeter nor more beautiful thing in English poetry than "The Faëry Queen"; yet the Chaucer of the Prologue has—and will ever have—a thousand lovers to Spenser's one. Mr. Wilfrid Blunt is no Spenserian; and, as it seems to me, his verse is like to abide an interest unto many generations of Englishmen as a reflection, unique in kind and entirely credible in effect, of a certain aspect of Victorian England. At the time of writing, his "Proteus" remains the truest and sincerest revelation done in these times of the emotions peculiar to men's youth. And if we read Sidney's "Astrophel" and Shakespeare's "Sonnets" as much for their matter as for their art—(and 'tis to be feared that to many their art is nothing, but their matter is all)—it is permissible to conjecture of a time which, however it may reckon with this Poet's art, will set the "Proteus" sequence beside these others; for the reason that it can say of the "Proteus," as of these others:—Whoso touches this book touches a man, and in him touches as much of his age as it was vouchsafed to him to see.

For the rest there is a Poetry of Life, even as there is a Poetry of Art. In English the two at their highest are met in Chaucer and (especially) in Shakespeare, and in these alone. And the poet of "Proteus" and some other things must be, and no doubt is, content to know himself one of them that follow—not Milton, the supreme Poet of Art, but—Byron and Burns: poets who courted Life like a mistress, and made no more account of Art than many make of their wives, but were satisfied with companionship, and a pleasant house, and the presence of goodly and fruitful issue. The poet of "Proteus" and some other

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things has courted Art with a more solemn face, a more "austere regard of control," than either Burns or Byron: as his caudated sonnets and his assonants—his "From the Arabic"—are here to show. I have nothing to say of the first except that he handles the form so well that you are scarce ever aware of its differences and never of its defects. And I have nothing to say of his assonants except that assonants in English are not assonants at all, so that, as I think, he has wasted on his experiment much admirable emotion which he had better have cast in an English rhythm. This asserted, I rejoice to proclaim my belief in his book as one personal, distinguished, packed with experience, alive—alike as diction, as emotion, and as truth—from cover to cover.

W. E. H.

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THE LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

Dedication

TO ONE IN A HIGH POSITION

To you, a poet, glorious, heaven-born,
One who is not a poet but a son
Of the earth earthy, sick and travel-worn
And weary with a race already run,
A battle lost e'er yet his day is done,
Comes with this tribute, shattered banners torn
From a defeat. You reign in Macedon,
My Alexander, as at earlier morn
You reigned upon Parnassus, hero, king.
I reign no more, not even in those hearts
For which these songs were made, and if I sing
'Tis with a harsh and melancholy note,
At which my own heart like an echo starts.
Yet sometimes I can deem you listening,
And then all else is instantly forgot.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

To *Manon* ☞ COMPARING HER TO A FALCON

i

BRAVE as a falcon and as merciless,
With bright eyes watching still the world, thy prey,
I saw thee pass in thy lone majesty,
Untamed, unmated, high above the press.
The dull crowd gazed at thee. It could not guess
The secret of thy proud aërial way,
Or read in thy mute face the soul which lay
A prisoner there in chains of tenderness.
Lo, thou art captured. In my hand to-day
I hold thee, and awhile thou deignest to be
Pleased with my jesses. I would fain beguile
My foolish heart to think thou lovest me. See,
I dare not love thee quite. A little while
And thou shalt sail back heavenwards. Woe is me !

To *Manon* ☞ ON HIS FORTUNE IN LOVING HER

ij

I DID not choose thee, dearest. It was Love
That made the choice, not I. Mine eyes were blind
As a rude shepherd's who to some lone grove
His offering brings and cares not at what shrine
He bends his knee. The gifts alone were mine ;
The rest was I ove's. He took me by the hand,
And fired the sacrifice, and poured the wine,
And spoke the words I might not understand.
I was unwise in all but the dear chance
Which was my fortune, and the blind desire
Which led my foolish steps to love's abode,
And youth's sublime unreasoned prescience
Which raised an altar and inscribed in fire
Its dedication "to the unknown god."

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

To Manon ♀ IN PRAISE OF HIS FATE

iii

WHEN I hear others speak of this and that
In our fools' lives which might have better gone,
Complaining idly of too niggard fate
And wishing still their senseless past undone,
I feel a childish tremor through me run,
Stronger than reason, lest by some far chance
Fate's ear to our sad complaints should yet be won
And these our lives be thrown back on our hands.
I tremble when I think of my past years,
My hopes, my aims, my wishes. All these days
I might have wandered far from love and thee.
But kind fate held me, heedless of my prayers,
A prisoner to its wise mysterious ways,
And forced me to thy feet—ah fortunate me!

To Manon ♀ ON THE POWER OF HER BEAUTY

iv

I AM lighthearted now. An hour ago
There was a tempest in my heaven, a flame
Of sullen lightning under a bent brow
And a dull muttering which breathed no name.
Now all is changed. The very winds are tame,
And the birds sing aloud from every bough,
And my heart leaps. What empire dost thou claim,
Child, o'er this earth, that nature serves thee so?
Sublime magician! Well may earth and heaven
Change at thy bidding, and the hearts of men.
Didst thou but know the power that beauty hath,
The sea should leave his bed, the rocks be riven,
And wise men, deeming chaos come again,
Should kneel before thee and conjure thy wrath.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

To *Banon* ☉ DEPRECIATING HER BEAUTY

v

✧ I LOVE not thy perfections. When I hear
Thy beauty blazoned, and the common tongue
Cheapening with vulgar praise a lip, an ear,
A cheek that I have prayed to;—when among
The loud world's gods my god is noised and sung,
Her wit applauded, even her taste, her dress,
Her each dear hidden marvel lightly flung
At the world's feet and striped to nakedness—
Then I despise thy beauty utterly,
Crying, "Be these your gods, O Israel!"
And I remember that on such a day
I found thee with eyes bleared and cheeks all pale,
And lips that trembled to a voiceless cry,
And that thy bosom in my bosom lay.

To *Banon* ☉ ON HER VANITY

vi

✧ WHAT are these things thou lovest? Vanity.
To see men turn their heads when thou dost pass;
To be the signboard and the looking-glass
Where every idler there may glut his eye;
To hear men speak thy name mysteriously,
Wagging their heads. Is it for this, alas,
That thou hast made a placard of a face
On which the tears of love were hardly dry?
What are these things thou lovest? The applause
Of prostitutes at wit which is not thine;
The sympathy of shop-boys who would weep
Their shilling's worth of woe in any cause,
At any tragedy.—Their tears and mine,
What difference? Oh truly tears are cheap!

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

To **Manon** ☞ AS TO HIS CHOICE OF HER

vij

If I had chosen thee, thou shouldst have been
A virgin proud, untamed, immaculate,
Chaste as the morning star, a saint, a queen,
Scarred by no wars, no violence of hate.
Thou shouldst have been of soul commensurate
With thy fair body, brave and virtuous
And kind and just; and, if of poor estate,
At least an honest woman for my house.
I would have had thee come of honoured blood
And honourable nurture. Thou shouldst bear
Sons to my pride and daughters to my heart,
And men should hold thee happy, wise, and good.
Lo, thou art none of this, but only fair,
Yet must I love thee, dear, and as thou art.

To **Manon** ☞ ON HER WAYWARDNESS

vijj

THIS is rank slavery. It better were
To till the thankless earth with sweat of brow,
Following dull oxen 'neath a goad of care
To a boor's grave agape behind the plough.
It better were to linger in some slow
Unnatural case, the sport of flood or fire,
To be undone by some inhuman vow
And robbed in youth of youth and its desire.
Better it were to perish than thus live
Thy pensioner and bondsman, day by day
Doing fool's service thus for love of thee.
How shall I save thee if thou wilt not grieve
Even for shames like these? How shall I slay
The foes thou lovest, thou, their enemy?

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

To Manon ☞ ON HER FORGIVENESS OF A WRONG ix

THIS is not virtue. To forgive were great
If love were in the issue and not gold.
But wrongs there are 'tis treason to forget,
And to forgive before the deed was cold
Was a strange jest. Ah, Manon, you have sold
The keys of heaven at a vulgar rate,
A sum of money for the wealth untold
Of a just anger and the right to hate.
—Well. It is done, and the price paid. Now make
Haste to betray them as you me betrayed.
These are no longer foes to be forgiven.
Remember they are friends, that peace is made,
That you are theirs—Then rend them for love's sake,
And let your hatred with your love be even.

To Manon ☞ ON HER LIGHTHEARTEDNESS x

I WOULD I had thy courage, dear, to face
This bankruptcy of love, and greet despair
With smiling eyes and unconcerned embrace,
And these few words of banter at "dull care."
I would that I could sing and comb my hair
Like thee the morning thro', and choose my dress,
And gravely argue what I best should wear,
A shade of ribbon or a fold of lace.
I would I had thy courage and thy peace,
Peace passing understanding; that mine eyes
Could find forgetfulness like thine in sleep;
That all the past for me like thee could cease
And leave me cheerfully, sublimely wise,
Like David with washed face who ceased to weep.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

HE HAS FALLEN FROM THE HEIGHT OF HIS LOVE xi

LOVE, how ignobly hast thou met thy doom !
Ill-seasoned scaffolding by which, full-fraught
With passionate youth and mighty hopes, we clomb
To our heart's heaven, fearing, doubting, naught !
O love, thou wert too frail for such mad sport,
Too rotten at thy core, designed too high !
And we, who trusted thee, our death have bought,
And bleeding on the ground must surely die.
—I will not see her. What she now may be
I care not. For the dream within my brain
Is fairer, nobler, and more kind than she—
And with that vision I can mock at pain.
God ! Was there ever woman half so sweet,
Or death so bitter, or at such dear feet ?

TO HIS FRIEND, COMPLAINING THAT HE HAD xij
FALLEN AMONG THIEVES

O, L——, I have gambled with my soul,
And, like a spendthrift, pawned my heritage
To pitiless Jews, and paid a monstrous toll
To knaves and usurers,—and all to wage
Fair war with black-legs, men who dared to gauge
My youth's bright honour as an antique thing,
A broadsword to their fencing point and edge.
So the game went. And even yet I cling
To my mad humour, reckoning up each stake,
Each fair coin lost.—O miserable slaves,
Who for the sake of gold, the poorest thing
Man ever won from the earth's bosom, take
To rope or poison, and who labour not
Even to "dig dishonourable graves,"
See one who has lost a pound for every groat,
For every penny of your squandering !

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

HE ARGUES WITH HIS LIFE

xij

My life, what strange mad garments hast thou on,
Now that I see thee truly and am wise,
Thou wild, lost Proteus, strangling and undone !
What shapes are these, what metamorphoses
Of a god's soul in pain ? I hear thy cries
And see thee writhe and take fantastic forms,
And strike in blindness at the destinies
And at thyself, and at thy brother worms.
Ah, foolish worm, thou canst not change thy lot,
And all like thee must perish 'neath the sun.
Why struggle with thy fellows ? Nay, be kind,
Kinder than these. Behold, the flower-pot
Of fate is emptied out, and one by one
The fisher takes you, and his hooks are blind.

JOY'S TREACHERY

xiv

I HAD a live joy once and pampered her,
For I had brought her from the "golden East,"
To lie when nights were cold upon my breast
And sit beside me the long days and purr,
Until her whole soul should be lapped in fur,
Deep as her claws ; a beautiful sleek beast,
Which I might love.—But, when I deemed it least,
Her topaz eyes were on my stomacher,
Athirst for blood. Thus, for I loathed her since
I learned her guile, one night I had her slain
And thrown upon a dunghill to the flies,
Who bred in her fair limbs a pestilence,
Whereof I sickened.—Thus it ever is :
Dead joys unburied breed us death and pain.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

HE LAMENTS THAT HIS LOVE IS DEAD

xv

My love is dead, dead and in spite of me,—
Dead while I lived,—while yet my blood was rife
With hope and pleasure and the pride of life.
For my love ended unexpectedly
During the winter, stricken like a tree
By a night's cold, and frozen to the blood,
Whose leaves fell off and never were renewed
By any promise of the years to be.
And, when the spring came, and the birds,—to mate
Among its branches, lo! they found it bare,
Though all around was summer in the wood.
Yet they took heart awhile, incredulous
That such a tree should be for ever dead.
“'Tis early yet,” they cried. “The spring is late.
It shall still be as in the days that were.”
But summer came and went while the tree stood
Bare in the sun like a deserted house.
—Then the birds suddenly despaired and fled.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

HE PROTESTS, NOTWITHSTANDING, HIS LOVE **xvi**

To be cast forth from the fair light of heaven
Into the outer darkness and there lie,
Through unrecorded years of agony,
Unseen, unheard, unpitied, unforgiven ;
To be forgotten of the earth and sky,
Forgotten of the womb that once did bear,
The eyes that cheered, the voice that comforted,
The very breast where love had laid his head ;
To be alone with darkness and despair,
Alone with endless death, and not to die ;
All these be punishments within the hand
Of an avenging deity to deal.
To these I bow in weakness as behoves.
Yet not in anger but in love I stand
'Gainst heaven, a new Prometheus, and appeal
From God to my own soul which ceaseless loves.
His be the wrath, the burning and the rod.
Hell shall not make me traitor to my God.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

ON FALLING ILL THROUGH GRIEF

xvij

TRUCE to thee, Soul, I have a debt to pay,
Which I acknowledge and without thy pleading.
I like thee little that thou barrest my way
With prayers too late for one well past thy heeding.
Truce to these tears ! Thy fellow lieth bleeding,
Wounded by thee ; and thou, forsooth, dost say,
“ I have a servant who is sick and needing
Care at men’s hands.” The care was thine to pay.
—When this same Soul was sick, a while ago,
The Body watched her, till his eyes grew dim
And his cheeks pale for very sympathy,
Because she grieved. His love hath wrought him woe,
For he is sick and she despiseth him.
Poor Body, I must take some thought of thee.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

To Juliet ♀ ON THE NATURE OF LOVE

xviii

You ask my love. What shall my love then be ?
A hope, an aspiration, a desire ?
The soul's eternal charter writ in fire
Upon the earth, the heavens, and the sea ?
You ask my love. The carnal mystery
Of a soft hand, of finger-tips that press,
Of eyes that kindle and of lips that kiss,
Of sweet things known to thee and only thee ?
You ask my love. What love can be more sweet
Than hope or pleasure ? Yet we love in vain.
The soul is more than joy, the life than meat.
The sweetest love of all were love in pain,
And that I will not give. So let it be.
—Nay, give me any love, so it be love of thee.

To Juliet ♀ ASKING FOR HER HEART

xix

I

GIVE me thy heart, Juliet, give me thy heart !
I have a need of it, an absolute need,
Because my own heart has thus long been dead.
I live but by thy life. The very smart
Of this new pain which has been born of thee
Is thine, thy own great pleasure's counterpart.
I stand before thee naked. Clothe thou me.
Bring out a robe—thy truth, thy chastity.
Put rings upon my fingers—honour's meed.
For thou canst give, nor ever reck the cost,
Being the royal creature that thou art,
The fountain of all honour, whose high boast
Is to be greatest when thou givest most.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

11

Give me thy soul, Juliet, give me thy soul !
I am a bitter sea, which drinketh in
The sweetness of all waters, and so thine.
Thou, like a river, pure and swift and full
And freighted with the wealth of many lands,
With hopes, and fears, and death and life, dost roll
Against the troubled ocean of my sin.
Thou doubtest not, though on these desert sands
The billows surge against thee black with brine,
Unwearied. For thy love is fixed and even
And bears thee onward, and thy faith is whole.
Though thyself shouldst sin, yet surely heaven Thou
Hath held thee guiltless and thou art forgiven.

To Juliet ASKING THE FULFILMENT OF HER xx LOVE

I ASK for love who famished am in plenty,
Not scorning the dear manna of your tears,
But being vexed with that too froward twenty
Which heads the sum of my rebellious years.
My soul is fallen "in lust of cucumbers,
Of fish, of melons," through its long abstaining.
Unworthy Egypt yet enslaves my fears.
Ah, love, I thirst, but not for heaven's raining.
Why speak to me, alas, of heavenly joys
Who ask for joys of earth these cannot cheat ?
What are these clouds, these pillars of fire to me ?
The wilderness is long. Youth cannot be
For ever fed on these unnatural toys,
And needs must murmur if it have not meat.

13

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

To Juliet ♀ IN ANSWER TO A QUESTION

xxi

WHY should I hate you, love, or why despise
For that last proof of tenderness you gave ?
The battle is not always to the brave,
Nor life's sublimest wisdom to the wise.
True courage often is in frightened eyes,
And reason in sweet lips that only rave.
There is a weakness stronger than the grave,
And blood poured out has overcome the skies
—Nay, love, I honour you the more for this,
That you have rent the veil, and ushered in
A fellow soul to your soul's holy place.
And why should either blush that we have been
One day in Eden, in our nakedness ?
—'Tis conscience makes us sinners, not our sin.

To Juliet ♀ WHO WOULD COMFORT HIM

xxij

I DID not ask your pity, dear. Your zeal
I know. It cannot cure me of my woes.
And you, in your sweet happiness, who knows,
Deserve it rather I should pity feel
For what the coming years from you conceal.
I did but cry, thou dear Samaritan,
Out of my bitterness of soul. Each man
Hath his own sorrow treading on his heel,
Ready to strike him, and must keep his shield
To his own back. Fate's arrows thickly fly,
And, if they strike not now, will strike at even.
And so I ask no pity. On life's field
The wounded crawl together, but their cry
Is not to one another but to Heaven.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

THE RELIGION OF LOVE

xxij

So thou but love me, dear, with thy whole heart
What care I for the rest, for good or ill?
What for the peace of soul good deeds impart,
What for the tears unholy dreams distil?
These cannot make my joy, nor shall they kill.
Thou only perfect peace and virtue art
And holiness for me and strength and will—
So thou but love me with a perfect heart.
I ask thee now no longer to be wise;
No longer to be good, but loving me.
I ask thee nothing now but only this.
Henceforth my Bible, dear, shall be thine eyes,
My beads thy lips, my prayers thy constancy,
My heaven thine arms, eternity thy kiss.

TO ONE WHO LOVED HIM

xxiv

I CANNOT love you, love, as you love me,
In singleness of soul, and faith untried:
I have no faith in any destiny,
In any heaven, even at your side.
Our hearts are all too weak, the world too wide,
You but a woman. If I dare to give
Some thought, some tenderness, a little pride,
A little love, 'tis yours, love, to receive.
And do not grieve, though now the gift appear
A drop to your love's ocean. Time shall see.
—Oh, I could prophesy:—That day is sure,
Though not perhaps this week, nor month, nor year,
When your great love shall clean forgotten be,
And my poor tenderness shall yet endure.
'Tis not the trees that make the tallest show,
Which stand out stoutest when the tempests blow.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

To Juliet ☛ EXHORTING HER TO PATIENCE

xxv

WHY do we fret at the inconstancy
Of our frail hearts, which cannot always love ?
Time rushes onward, and we mortals move
Like waifs upon a river, neither free
To halt nor hurry. Sweet, if destiny
Throws us together for an hour, a day,
In the back-water of this quiet bay,
Let us rejoice. Before us lies the sea,
Where we must all be lost in spite of love.
We dare not stop to question. Happiness
Lies in our hand unsought, a treasure trove.
Time has short patience of man's vain distress ;
And fate grows angry at too long delay ;
And floods rise fast, and we are swept away.

To Juliet ☛ REMINDING HER OF A PROMISE

xxvi

I

O JULIET, we have quarrelled with our fate,
And fate has struck us. Wherefore do we cry ?
We prayed for liberty, and now too late
Find liberty is this, to say "good-bye."
The winter which we loved not has gone by,
And spring has come. The gardens, which were bare
When we first wandered through them, you and I,
The prisoners of our own vain wishes, are
Now full of golden flowers. The very lane
Down to the sea is green. The cactus hedge
We saw cut down has sprouted new again,
And swallows have their nests on the cliff's edge
Where we so often sat and dared complain
Because our joy was new, and called it pain.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

II

Yes, Spring has come, but joy alas is gone,—
Gone ere we knew it, while our foolish eyes,
Which should have watched its motions every one
Were looking elsewhere, at the hills, the skies,
Chasing vain thoughts, as children butterflies,
Until the hour struck and the day was done,
And we looked up in passionate surprise
To find that clouds had blotted out our sun.
Our joys are gone—and what is left to us,
Who loved not even love when it was here?
What but a voice which sobs monotonous
As these sad waves upon the rocks, the dear
Fond voice which once made music with our own,
And which our hearts now ache to think upon.

III

Old memories are sweet, but these are new
And smart like wounds yet green. But one there is
Which, for the cause that it was dear to you
In days which counted upon greater bliss,
Is fairer now and dearer far than these;
And this the memory is of some hours spent
One afternoon when, seated at your knees,
I made narration (it was middle Lent
And you with Judas flowers had filled your lap)
Of the wise secret of these rhymes of mine,
And gave a promise, which behold I keep,
To write them out for you, each idle line,
Throwing you all my rubbish in one heap.
Poor stuff perhaps;—and yet it made you weep.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

To Juliet ☉ FEAR HAS CAST OUT LOVE

xxvij

'Tis not that love is less or sorrow more
Than in the days when first these things began.
Even then you doubted, and our hearts were sore
And you rebelled because I was a man.
Even then you fought and wrestled with my plan
Of earthly bliss ; what bitter anguish too
When at the hour decreed our passion ran
Out of our keeping and love claimed its due.
'Tis not love's fault we part, nor grief's. Alas,
One mightier now compels us with his nod.
The fire of heaven has touched us, and we pass
From pleasure's chastenings to a fiercer rod ;
And fear has cast out love, for flesh is grass
And we are withered with the wrath of God.

TO ONE WHO WOULD "REMAIN FRIENDS"

xxviii

WHAT is this prate of friendship? Kings discrowned
Go forth, not citizens but outlawed men.
If love has ceased to give a loyal sound,
Let there at least be silence. Once again
I go, proscribed, exiled, dominionless
Out of your coasts, yet scorning to complain.
I grudge not your allegiance nor my bliss,
I yield the pleasure as I keep the pain.
Rebellion's rights are limited though strong.
The right to take gives not the right to give.
Mine were the sole right and prerogative
To give a title or forgive a wrong.
This gift of friendship was not yours to bring.
As I have lived in love I still will live
Or die, if needs must, and without reprieve,
Your lover yet and kingdomless a king.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

TO ONE NOW ESTRANGED

xxix

WHY did you love me? Was it not enough
That the world loved you, all the world and I,
Or was your heart of so sublime a stuff
That it might trifle with inconstancy
And love and cease to love and yet not die?
Heaven was your throne by right of happiness
And earth your footstool. All things great and high
Waited your bidding, love itself no less.
Yet, if you deigned to love, if from your place
In heaven you stooped, if, when your heart was moved,
A thrill of human pleasure tinged your face,
If 'twas in weakness not in strength you loved,
Then there was cause to blush. Yet, loving, how
Shall you blush less to be apostate now?

FAREWELL TO JULIET

xxx

I

JULIET, farewell. I would not be forgiven
Even if I forgave. These words must be
The last between us two in earth or heaven,
The last and bitterest. You are henceforth free
For ever from my bitter words and me.
You shall not at my hand be further vexed
With either love, reproach or jealousy,
(So help me heaven), in this world or the next.
Our souls are single for all time to come
And for eternity, and this farewell
Is as the trumpet note, the crack of doom,
Which heralds an eternal silence. Hell
Has no more fixed and absolute decree.
And heaven and hell may meet,—yet never we.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

II

'Tis strange we are thus parted, not by death
Or man's device, but by our own mad will,
We who have stood together on life's path
Thro' half a youth of good repute and ill,
Friends more than lovers. See, love's citadel
We held so stoutly 'gainst a world in arms
Lies all dismantled now, a sight to fill
The earth with lamentations and alarms.
Whose was the fault? I dare not ask nor say.
If there was treachery, 'tis best untold.
The price of treason we receive to-day
Is paid to both of us in evil gold.
Ay, take thy bitter freedom. 'Tis the fee
Of love betrayed and faith's apostasy.

III

We may not meet. I could not for pride's sake
Dissemble further, and I suffer pain,
A palpable distinct and physical ache,
When our eyes meet by accident, and when
I hear you talk in your pathetic strain
Which always moved me. Only yesterday,
As I was standing with a crowd of men
In the long corridor, you came my way
And chanced to stop, and thus by chance I heard
A score of phrases uttered in that sad
Half-suppliant voice which once my spirit stirred
To its foundations. Yet your theme was glad—
Strangers your hearers. What was in these spells
To move me still? A trick and nothing else?

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

IV

We vex each other with our presence, I
By my regrets and by my mocking face,
You by your laughter and mad gaiety,
And both by cruel thoughts of happier days.
Is then the world so narrow that we pace
These streets like prisoners still with eyes askance,
As bound together in the fell embrace
Of a dark chain which bars deliverance?
Nay, go your ways. I will not vex you more.
Make your own terms with life, while you are fair.
There is none better learned in woman's lore,
You yet may take revenge on grief and care,
And 'twas your nature ever to be gay.
Why should I scoff? Be merry while you may.

V

I do not love you. To have said this once
Had seemed to both of us a monstrous lie,
An idle boast, love's last extravagance
Or the mere paradox of vanity.
Now it is true and yet more hideously,
More strangely monstrous. I, no less than you,
Here own at length the worm which cannot die,
The burden of a pain for ever new.
This is the "pang of loss," the bitterest
Which hell can give. We are shut out from heaven
And never more shall look upon love's face,
Being with those who perish unforgiven.
Never to see love's face! Ah, pain in pain,
Which we do well to weep and weep again.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

VI

Yet we shall live without love, as some live
Without their limbs, their senses, maimed or deaf.
We even shall forget love, and shall thrive
And prosper and grow fat upon our grief.
You are consoled already more than half,
And wear your sorrow lightly. I will boast
No longer the refusal of relief
Than as a decent mourner of hopes crossed.
We yet shall laugh, and laughter is more loud
When following tears. The men who drive a hearse
Are not the least lighthearted of the crowd.
See, we have made love's epitaph in verse
And fairly buried him. God's ways are best.
Then home to pleasure and the funeral feast.

VII

Do you remember how I laughed at you
In the Beaulieu woods, and how I made my peace?
It was your thirtieth birthday, and you threw
Stones like a school-girl at the chestnut-trees.
The heavens were light above us and the breeze.
Your Corydon and all the merry crew
Had wandered to a distance—busier bees
Than we, who cared not where the hazels grew.
We were alone at last. I had been teasing
You with the burden of years left behind.
You were too fair to find my wit displeasing,
And I too tender to be less than kind.
Your pebbles struck me. "Wretch!" I cried. The word
Entered our hearts that instant like a sword.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

VIII

Thrice happy fools ! What wisdom shall we learn
In this world or the next, if next there be,
More deep, more full, more worthy our concern
Than that first word of folly taught us ? We
Had suddenly grown silent. I could see
Your cheek had lost a little of its hue,
And your lips trembled, and beseechingly
Your blue eyes turned to mine, and well I knew
Your woman's instinct had divined my speech,
The meaning of a word so lightly spoken.
The word was a confession, clear to each,
A pledge as plain and as distinct a token
As that of Peter at his master's knees.
"Thou knowest that I love thee more than these."

IX

I see you, Juliet, still, with your straw hat
Loaded with vines, and with your dear pale face,
On which those thirty years so lightly sat,
And the white outline of your muslin dress.
You wore a little *fichu* trimmed with lace
And crossed in front, as was the fashion then,
Bound at your waist with a broad band or sash,
All white and fresh and virginally plain.
There was a sound of shouting far away
Down in the valley, as they called to us,
And you, with hands clasped seeming still to pray
Patience of fate, stood listening to me thus
With heaving bosom. There a rose lay curled.
It was the reddest rose in all the world.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

x

I think there never was a dearer woman,
A better, kinder, truer than you were,
A gentler spirit more divinely human
Than yours with your sweet melancholy air
Of tender gaiety, which seemed like care.
And in your voice a sob as of distress
At the world's ways, its sin and its despair,
Being yourself all strange to wickedness.
Now you are neither gentle, kind, nor good,
And you have sorrows of your own to grieve,
And in your mirth compassion has no mood ;
You wear no more your heart upon your sleeve,
And if your voice still sobs 'tis with a sense
Of sorrow's power, grief's wealth, experience.

xi

A "woman with a past." What happier omen
Could heart desire for mistress or for friend ?
Phoenix of friends, and most divine of women,
Skilled in all fence to venture or defend
And with love's science at your finger's end,
No tears to vex, no ignorance to bore,
A fancy ripe, the zest which sorrows lend !—
I would to God we had not met before.
—I would to God ! and yet to God I would
That we had never met. To see you thus
Is grief and wounds and poison to my blood.
Oh, this is sacrilege and foul abuse.
You were a thing for honour not vile use,
Not for the mad world's wicked sinks and stews.

24

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

XII

What have I done? What gross impiety
Prompted my hand thus against God and good?
Was there not joy on Earth enough for me
That I must scale the Heaven where you stood,
And with my sinful blood pollute your blood?
You were the type of wise sweet sanctity,
Of that unearthly half of womanhood
Which well redeems the rest. O Juliet, we
Sinned in a temple, and our tears to-day
Appeal in vain to Heaven, which dares not hear.
God is not always mocked. And thus we pay
Our uttermost debt unheeded, tear on tear
And scoff on scoff, and sin heaped up on sin,
While there is justice on the earth to men.

XIII

We planted love, and lo it bred a brood
Of lusts and vanities and senseless joys.
We planted love, and you have gathered food
Of every bitter herb which fills and cloy.
Your meat is loud excitement and mad noise,
Your wine the unblest ambition of command
O'er hearts of men, of dotards, idiots, boys.
These are the playthings fitted to your hand,
These are your happiness. You weep no more,
But I must weep. My heaven has been defiled.
My sin has found me out and smites me sore,
And folly, justified of her own child,
Rules all the empire where love reigned of yore—
Folly red-cheeked but rotten to the core.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

XIV

Lame, impotent conclusion to youth's dreams
Vast as all heaven! See, what glory lies
Entangled here in these base stratagems,
What virtue done to death! Oh glorious sighs,
Sublime beseechings, high cajoleries,
Fond wraths, brave raptures, all that sometime was
Our daily bread of gods beneath the skies,
How are ye ended, in what utter loss!
Time was, time is, and time is yet to come,
Till even Time itself shall have its end.
These were eternal—and behold, a tomb!
Come, let us laugh and eat and drink. God send
What all the world must need one day as we,
Speedy oblivion, rest for memory.

XV

Farewell, then. It is finished. I forego
With this all right in you, even that of tears.
If I have spoken hardly, it will show
How much I loved you. With you disappears
A glory, a romance of many years.
What you may be henceforth I will not know.
The phantom of your presence on my fears
Is impotent at length for weal or woe.
Your past, your present, all alike must fade
In a new land of dreams, where love is not.
Then kiss me and farewell. The choice is made
And we shall live to see the past forgot,
If not forgiven. See, I came to curse,
Yet stay to bless. I know not which is worse.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

Gods and False Gods ♣

HE DESIRES THE IMPOSSIBLE

xxxii

If it were possible the fierce sun should,
Standing in heaven unloved, companionless,
Enshrined be in some white-bosomed cloud,
And so forget his rage and loneliness ;
If it were possible the bitter seas
Should suddenly grow sweet, till at their brink
Birds with bright eyes should stoop athirst and drink ;
If these were possible ; and if to these
It should be proved that love has sometimes been
'Twixt lambs and leopards, doves and hawks, that snow
Clasps the bare rocks, that rugged oaks grow green
In the west wind, that pinkest blossoms blow
Upon May's blackest thorn ;—then, only then,
I might believe that love between us two
Was still in heaven's gift, sweet child.—And you ?

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

xxxij

To-DAY, all day, I rode upon the down,
With hounds and horsemen, a brave company.
On this side in its glory lay the sea,
On that the Sussex weald, a sea of brown.
The wind was light, and brightly the sun shone,
And still we galloped on from gorse to gorse.
And once, when checked, a thrush sang, and my horse
Pricked his quick ears as to a sound unknown.
I knew the Spring was come. I knew it even
Better than all by this, that through my chase
In bush and stone and hill and sea and heaven
I seemed to see and follow still your face.
Your face my quarry was. For it I rode,
My horse a thing of wings, myself a god.

TO ONE WHOM HE DARED NOT LOVE

xxxiiij

As one who, in a desert wandering
Alone and faint beneath a pitiless sky,
And doubting in his heart if he shall bring
His bones back to his kindred or there die,
Finds at his feet a treasure suddenly
Such as would make him for all time a king,
And so forgets his fears and with keen eye
Falls to a-counting each new precious thing,
—So was I when you told me yesterday
The tale of your dear love. Awhile I stood
Astonished and enraptured, and my heart
Began to count its treasures. Now dismay
Steals back my joy, and terror chills my blood,
And I remember only “we must part.”

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

ON A LOST OPPORTUNITY

xxxiv

WE might, if you had willed, have conquered heaven.
Once only in our lives before the gate
Of Paradise we stood, one fortunate even,
And gazed in sudden rapture through the grate.
And, while you stood astonished, I, our fate
Venturing, pushed the latch and found it free.
There stood the tree of knowledge fair and great
Beside the tree of life. One instant we
Stood in that happy garden, guardianless.
My hands already turned towards the tree,
And in another moment we had known
The taste of joy and immortality
And been ourselves as gods. But in distress
You thrust me back with supplicating arms
And eyes of terror, till the impatient sun
Had time to set and till the heavenly host
Rushed forth on us with clarions and alarms
And cast us out for ever, blind and lost.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

TO ONE ON HER WASTE OF TIME

xxxv

WHY practise, love, this small economy
Of your heart's favours? Can you keep a kiss
To be enjoyed in age? and would the free
Expense of pleasure leave you penniless?
Nay, nay. Be wise. Believe me, pleasure is
A gambler's token, only gold to-day.
The day of love is short, and every bliss
Untasted now is a bliss thrown away.
'Twere pitiful, in truth, such treasures should
Lie by like miser's crusts till mouldy grown.
Think you the hand of age will be less rude
In touching your sweet bosom than my own?
Alas, what matter, when our heads are grey,
Whether you loved or did not love to-day?

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

xxxvi

How loud the storm blew all that bitter night!
The loosened ivy tapping on the pane
Woke me and woke, again and yet again,
Till I was full awake and sat upright.
I listened to the noises of the night,
And presently I heard, disguised yet plain,
A footstep on the stair which mounted light
Towards me, and my heart outbeat the rain.
I knew that it was you. I knew it even
Before the door, which by design ajar
Waited your coming, had disclosed my fate.
I felt a wind upon my face from heaven.
I felt the presence of a life. My hair
Was touched as by a spirit. Insensate
I drew you to my bosom. Ah, too late!
I clutched the darkness. There was nothing there.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE

xxxvij

AH Love, dear Love. In vain I scoff. In vain
I ply my barren wit, and jest at thee.
Thou heedest not, or dost forgive the pain,
And in thy own good time and thy own way,
Waiting my silence, thou dost vanquish me.
Thou comest at thy will in sun or rain
And at the hour appointed, a spring day,
An autumn night—and lo, I serve again.
Forgive me, touch me, chide me. What to thee
God that thou art, are these vain shifts of mine?
Let me but know thee. Thou alone art wise.
I ask not to be wise or great or free,
Or aught but at thy knees and wholly thine,
Thus, and to feel thy hand upon mine eyes.

TO ONE EXCUSING HIS POVERTY

xxxviiij

AH Love, impute it not to me a sin
That my poor soul thus beggared comes to thee.
My soul a pilgrim was, in search of thine,
And met these accidents by land and sea.
The world was hard, and took its usury,
Its toll for each new night in each new inn;
And every road had robber bands to fee;
And all, even kindness, must be paid in coin.
Behold my scrip is empty, my heart bare.
I give thee nothing who my all would give.
My pilgrimage is finished, and I fare
Bare to my death, unless with thee I live.
Ah! give, Love, and forgive that I am poor.
Ah! take me to thy arms and ask no more.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

TO ONE WHO WOULD MAKE A CONFESSION xxxix

Oh! leave the Past to bury its own dead.
The Past is naught to us, the Present all.
What need of last year's leaves to strew Love's bed?
What need of ghosts to grace a festival?
I would not, if I could, those days recall,
Those days not ours. For us the feast is spread,
The lamps are lit, and music plays withal.
Then let us love and leave the rest unsaid.
This island is our home. Around it roar
Great gulfs and oceans, channels, straits, and seas.
What matter in what wreck we reached the shore,
So we both reached it? We can mock at these.
Oh! leave the Past, if Past indeed there be.
I would not know it. I would know but thee.

THE PLEASURES OF LOVE

xi

I do not care for kisses. 'Tis a debt
We paid for the first privilege of love.
These are the rains of April which have wet
Our fallow hearts and forced their germs to move.
Now the green corn has sprouted. Each new day
Brings better pleasures, a more dear surprise,
The blade, the ear, the harvest—and our way
Leads through a region wealthy grown and wise.
We now compare our fortunes. Each his store
Displays to kindred eyes of garnered grain,
Two happy farmers, learned in love's lore,
Who weigh and touch and argue and complain.
Dear endless argument! Yet sometimes we
Even as we argue kiss. There! Let it be.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

HE APPEALS AGAINST HIS BOND

xli

IN my distress Love made me sign a bond,
A cruel bond. 'Twas by necessity
Wrung from a foolish heart, alas, too fond,
Too blindly fond, its error to foresee.
And now my soul's estate, in jeopardy,
Lies to a pledge it never can redeem.
Love's loan was love, one hour of ecstasy,
His penalty eternal loss of him.
—See, I am penniless, the forfeit paid,
And go a beggar forth from thy dear sight,
My pound of more than flesh too strictly weighed
And cut too near the heart. Fair Israelite,
Thy plea was just. Thy right has been confessed.
And yet a work of mercy were twice blessed.

TO ONE WHO SPOKE ILL OF HIM

xlij

WHAT is your quarrel with me, in love's name,
Fair queen of wrath? What evil have I done,
What treason to the thought of our dear shame
Subscribed or plotted? Is my heart less one
In its obedience to your stern decrees
Than on the day when first you said "I please,"
And with your lips ordained our union?
Am I not now, as then, upon my knees?
You bade me love you, and the deed was done,
And when you cried "Enough!" I stopped, and when
You bade me go I went, and when you said
"Forget me" I forgot. Alas, what wrong
Would you avenge upon a loyal head,
Which ever bowed to you in joy and pain,
That you thus scourge me with your pitiless tongue?

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

THE THREE AGES OF WOMAN

xliij

I

Love, in thy youth, a stranger, knelt to thee,
With cheeks all red and golden locks all curled,
And cried, "Sweet child, if thou wilt worship me,
Thou shalt possess the kingdoms of the world."
But you looked down and said, "I know you not,
Nor want I other kingdom than my soul."
Till love in shame, convicted of his plot,
Left you and turned him to some other goal.
And this discomfiture which you had seen
Long served you for your homily and boast,
While, of your beauty and yourself the queen,
You lived a monument of vain love crossed,
With scarce a thought of that which might have been
To scare you with the ghost of pleasures lost.

II

Your youth flowed on, a river chaste and fair,
Till thirty years were written to your name.
A wife, a mother, these the titles were
Which conquered for you the world's fairest fame.
In all things you were wise but in this one,
That of your wisdom you yourself did doubt.
Youth spent like age, no joy beneath the sun.
Your glass of beauty vainly running out.
Then suddenly again, ere well you knew,
Love looked upon you tenderly, yet sad ;
"Are these wise follies, then, enough for you ?"
He said ;—"Love's wisdom were itself less mad."
And you : "What wouldst thou of me ?" "My bare due,
In token of what joys may yet be had."

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

III

Again Love left you. With appealing eyes
You watched him go, and lips apart to speak.
He left you, and once more the sun did rise
And the sun set, and week trod close on week
And month on month, till you had reached the goal
Of forty years, and life's full waters grew
To bitterness and flooded all your soul,
Making you loathe old things and pine for new.
And you into the wilderness had fled,
And in your desolation loud did cry,
"Oh! for a hand to turn these stones to bread":
Then in your ear Love whispered scornfully:
"Thou too, poor fool, thou, even thou," he said,
"Shalt taste thy little honey ere thou die."

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

SIBYLLINE BOOKS

xliv

WHEN first, a boy, at your fair knees I kneeled,
'Twas with a worthy offering. In my hand
My young life's book I held, a volume sealed,
Which none but you, I deemed, might understand.
And you I did entreat to loose the band
And read therein your own soul's destiny.
But, Tarquin-like, you turned from my demand,
Too proudly fair to find your fate in me.
When now I come, alas, what hands have turned
Those virgin pages ! Some are torn away,
And some defaced, and some with passion burned,
And some besmeared with life's least holy clay.
Say, shall I offer you these pages wet
With blood and tears ? and will your sorrow read
What your joy heeded not ? Unopened yet
One page remains. It still may hold a fate,
A counsel for the day of utter need.
Nay, speak, sad heart, speak quick. The hour is late.
Age threatens us. The Gaul is at the gate.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

ON READING THE MEMOIRS OF M. D'ARTAGNAN xlv

WHY was I born in this degenerate age ?
Or rather why, a thousand times, with soul
Of such degenerate stuff that a mute rage
Is all its reason, tears the only toll
It takes on life, and impotence its goal ?
Why was I born to this sad heritage
Of fierce desires which cannot fate control,
Of idle hopes life never can assuage ?
Why was I born thus weak ?—Oh to have been
A merry fool, at jest with destiny ;
A free hand ready, and a heart as free ;
A ruffler in the camps of Mazarin.
Oh for the honest soul of d'Artagnan,
Twice happy knave, a Gascon and a man !

THE TWO HIGHWAYMEN

xlvi

I LONG have had a quarrel set with Time,
Because he robbed me. Every day of life
Was wrested from me after bitter strife,
I never yet could see the sun go down
But I was angry in my heart, nor hear
The leaves fall in the wind without a tear
Over the dying summer. I have known
No truce with Time nor, Time's accomplice, Death.
The fair world is the witness of a crime
Repeated every hour. For life and breath
Are sweet to all who live ; and bitterly
The voices of these robbers of the heath
Sound in each ear and chill the passer-by.
—What have we done to thee, thou monstrous Time ?
What have we done to Death that we must die ?

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

FROM THE FRENCH OF ANVERS

xlviij

My heart has its secret, my soul its mystery,
A love which is eternal begotten in a day.
The ill is long past healing. Why should I speak to-day ?
For none have ears to hear, and, least of all, she.
Alas, I shall have lived unseen though ever near,
For ever at her side, for ever too alone.
I shall have lived my life unknowing and unknown,
Asking naught, daring naught, receiving naught from
her.

And she, whom heaven made kind and chaste and fair,
Shall go undoubting on, the while upon her way
The murmur of my love shall fill the land.
Till, reading here perchance severe and unaware
These lines so full of her, she shall look up and say,
"Who was this woman then ?" and shall not understand.

TO ONE TO WHOM HE HAD BEEN UNJUST

xlviij

If I was angry once that you refused
The bread I asked and offered me a stone,
Deeming the rights of bounty thus abused
And my poor beggary but trampled on,
Believe me now I would that wrong atone
With such submission as a heart can show,
Asking no bread of life but that alone
Your dear heart proffered and my pride let go.
Give me your help, your pity, what you will,
Your pardon for a sin, your act of grace
For a rebellion vanquished and undone,
The stone I once refused, that precious stone
Your friendship, so my thoughts may serve you still
Even if I never more behold your face.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

THE MOCKERY OF LIFE

xlix

I

God, what a mockery is this life of ours !
Cast forth in blood and pain from our mother's womb,
Most like an excrement, and weeping showers
Of senseless tears : unreasoning, naked, dumb,
The symbol of all weakness and the sum :
Our very life a sufferance ! Presently,
Grown stronger, we must fight for standing-room
Upon the earth, and the bare liberty
To breathe and move. We crave the right to toil.
We push, we strive, we jostle with the rest.
We learn new courage, stifle our old fears,
Stand with stiff backs, take part in every broil.
It may be that we love, that we are blest.
It may be, for a little space of years,
We conquer fate and half forget our tears.

II

And then fate strikes us. First our joys decay.
Youth, with its pleasures, is a tale soon told.
We grow a little poorer day by day.
Old friendships falter. Loves grow strangely cold.
In vain we shift our hearts to a new hold
And barter joy for joy, the less for less.
We doubt our strength, our wisdom, and our gold.
We stand alone, as in a wilderness
Of doubts and terrors. Then, if we be wise,
We make our terms with fate and, while we may,
Sell our life's last sad remnant for a hope.
And it is wisdom thus to close our eyes.
But for the foolish, those who cannot pray,
What else remains of their dark horoscope
But a tall tree, and courage, and a rope ?

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

III

And who shall tell what ignominy death
Has yet in store for us ? what abject fears
Even for the best of us ? what fights for breath ?
What sobs, what supplications, what wild tears ?
What impotence of soul against despairs
Which blot out reason ?—The last trembling thought
Of each poor brain, as dissolution nears,
Is not of fair life lost, of heaven bought
And glory won. 'Tis not the thought of grief ;
Of friends deserted ; loving hearts which bleed ;
Wives, sisters, children who around us weep :
But only a mad clutching for relief
From physical pain, importunate Nature's need :
The search as for a womb where we may creep
Back from the world, to hide—perhaps to sleep.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

WHO WOULD LIVE AGAIN?

1

OH who would live again to suffer loss ?
Once in my youth I battled with my fate,
Grudging my days to death. I would have won
A place by violence beneath the sun.
I took my pleasures madly as by force,
Even the air of heaven was a prize.
I stood a plunderer at Death's very gate,
And all the lands of life I did o'errun
With sack and pillage. Then I scorned to die
Save as a conqueror. The treasures
Of love I ransacked ; pity, pride and hate,
All that can make hearts beat or brim men's eyes
With living tears, I took as robes to wear.
—But see, now Time has struck me on the hip.
I cannot hate nor love. My senses are
Struck silent with the silence of my lip.
No courage kindles in my heart to dare,
No strength to do. The world's last phantoms slip
Out of my grasp, and naught is left but pain.
Love, life, vain strength—Oh who would live again ?

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

COLD COMFORT

li

THERE is no comfort underneath the sun.
Youth turns to age ; riches are quickly spent ;
Pride breeds us pain, our pleasures punishment,
The very courage which we count upon
A single night of fever shall break down,
And love is slain by fear. Death last of all
Spreads out his nets and watches for our fall.
There is no comfort underneath the sun !
—When thou art old, O man, if thou wert proud
Be humble : pride will here avail thee not.
There is no courage which can conquer death.
Forget that thou wert wise. Nay, keep thy breath
For prayer, that so thy wisdom be forgot
And thou perhaps get pity of thy God.

AMOUR OBLIGE

lij

I COULD forgive you, dearest, all the folly
Your heart has dreamed. Alas, as we grow old,
We need more vigorous cures for melancholy,
A stronger nutriment for hearts grown cold.
We need in face of weakness to be bold.
We need our folly to keep fate at bay.
Oh, we need madness in the manifold
Doubts and despairs which herald our decay.
I could forgive you all and more than all,
Yet, dearest, though for us Fate waves his hand
And we accept it as the common lot
To meet no more at this life's festival,
It were unseemly you should take your stand,
Now my heart's citadel is laid in siege,
In open field with those who love me not.
Love has a rank which surely should oblige.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

TO ONE UNFORGOTTEN

liij

You are not *false*, perhaps, as lovers say !
Meaning the act—Alas, that guilt was mine !
Nor, maybe, have you bowed at other shrine
Than the true god's where first you learned to pray.
I know the idols round you. They are clay—
Mere Dagon to the courage half divine
Which bears you scathless still thro' sap and mine
And breach and storm upon your virgin way !
Alas, I know your virtue ! But your heart,
How have you treated it ? I sometimes see,
When nights are long, a vision chaste and true
Of pale pathetic eyes, which gaze on me
In love and grief eternal. Then I start,
Crying aloud, and reach my arms to you.

TO ONE WHOM HE HAD LOVED TOO LONG

liv

WHY do I cling to thee, sad love ? Too long
Thou bringest me neither pleasure to my soul
Nor profit to my reason save in song,
My daily utterance. See, thy beggar's dole
Of foolish tears cannot my tears cajole ;
Thy laughter doth my laughter grievous wrong ;
Thy anger angereth me ; thou heapest coal
Of fire upon my head the drear night long
With thy forgiveness. What is this thou wilt ?
Mine ears have ceased to hear, my tongue to speak,
And naught is left for my spent heart to do.
Love long has left the feast ; the cup is spilt.
Let us go too. The dawn begins to break,
And there is mockery in this heaven of blue.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

HE WOULD LEAD A BETTER LIFE

lv

I AM tired of folly, tired of my own ways,
Love is a strife. I do not want to strive.
If I had foes I now would make my peace.
If I less wedded were I now would wive.
I would do service to my kind, contrive
Something of good for men, some happiness
For those who in the world still love and live ;
And, as my fathers did, so end my days.
I would earn praise, I too, of honest men.
I would repent in sackcloth if needs be.
I would serve God and expiate my sin,
Abjuring love and thee—ay, even thee !
I would do this, dear love. But what am I
To will or do ? As we have lived, we die.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

Vita Nova 🐉

A DAY IN SUSSEX

lvi

THE dove did lend me wings. I fled away
From the loud world which long had troubled me.
Oh lightly did I flee when hoyden May
Threw her wild mantle on the hawthorn-tree.
I left the dusty high road, and my way
Was through deep meadows, shut with copses fair.
A choir of thrushes poured its roundelay
From every hedge and every thicket there.
Mild, moon-faced kine looked on, where in the grass
All heaped with flowers I lay, from noon till eve.
And hares unwitting close to me did pass,
And still the birds sang, and I could not grieve.
Oh what a blessed thing that evening was!
Peace, music, twilight, all that could deceive
A soul to joy or lull a heart to peace.
It glimmers yet across whole years like these.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

THE LIMIT OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

lviii

*THERE is a vice in the world's reasoning. Man
Has conquered knowledge. He has conquered power ;
He has traced out the universal plan
Of the earth's being ; and in this last hour
He has unmade the God which he had made.
I cannot doubt but he at length has read
The riddle of the Earth ; that he is wise.
He also hath dominion chartered
Over the lands, the oceans, and the skies,
Which toil and sweat to give him daily bread.
— Knowledge he hath, and power upon the earth,
And long ago he had himself been God,
But for the cruel secret of his birth,
Which gave him kindred with the dust he trod,
And for the hideous ending of his mirth,
A fly-blown carrion festering 'neath the sod.*

THE PRIDE OF UNBELIEF

lix

*WHEN I complained that I had lost my hope
Of life eternal with the eternal God ;
When I refused to read my horoscope
In the unchanging stars, or claim abode
With powers and dominations—but, poor clod,
Clung to the earth and grovelled in my tears,
Because I soon must lie beneath the sod
And close the little number of my years,—
Then I was told that pride had barred the way,
And raised this foul rebellion in my head.
Yet, strange rebellion ! I, but yesterday,
Was God's own son in His own likeness bred.
And thrice strange pride ! who thus am cast away
And go forth lost and disinherited.*

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

LAUGHTER AND DEATH

lx

THERE is no laughter in the natural world
Of beast or fish or bird, though no sad doubt
Of their futurity, to them unfurled,
Has dared to check the mirth-compelling shout.
The lion roars his solemn thunder out
To the sleeping woods. The eagle screams her cry,
Even the lark must strain a serious throat
To hurl his blest defiance at the sky.
Fear, anger, jealousy have found a voice.
Love's pain or rapture the brute bosoms swell.
Nature has symbols for her nobler joys,
Her nobler sorrows. Who had dared foretell
That only man, by some sad mockery,
Should learn to laugh who learns that he must die ?

WRITTEN IN DISTRESS

lxi

WE sometimes sit in darkness. I long while
Have sat there, in a shadow as of death.
My friends and comforters no longer smile,
And they who grudge me wrongfully my breath
Are strong and many. I am bowed beneath
A weight of trouble and unjust reproach
From many fools and friends of little faith.
The world is little worth, yet troubles much.
But I am comforted in this, that I,
Although my face is darkened to men's eyes
And all my life eclipsed with angry wars,
Now see things hidden ; and I seem to spy
New worlds above my heaven. Night is wise
And joy a sun which never guessed the stars.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

A DISAPPOINTMENT

lxij

SPRING, of a sudden, came to life one day.
Ere this, the winter had been cold and chill.
That morning first the summer air did fill
The world, making bleak March seem almost May.
The daffodils were blooming golden gay ;
The birch-trees budded purple on the hill ;
The rose, that clambered up the window-sill,
Put forth a crimson shoot. All yesterday
The winds about the casement chilly blew,
But now the breeze that played about the door,
So caught the dead leaves that I thought there flew
Brown butterflies up from the grassy floor.
—But some one said you came not Ah, too true !
And I, I thought that winter reigned once more.

A YEAR AGO

lxiiij

A YEAR ago I too was proud of May,
I too delighted in the blackbird's song.
When the sun shone my soul made holiday.
When the rain fell I felt it as a wrong—
Then for me too the world was fresh and young—
Oh what a miracle each bluebell was !
How my heart leaped in union with my tongue,
When first I lit upon a stag's-horn moss
A year ago !—Alas, one summer's fire,
One autumn's chill, one winter's discontent,
And now one spring of joy and hope deferred
Have brought me to this pass of undesire :
That I behold May's veil of beauty rent,
And stand unmoved by sun and flower and bird.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

HE IS NOT A POET

lxiv

I would not, if I could, be called a poet.
I have no natural love of the "chaste muse."
If aught be worth the doing I would do it;
And others, if they will, may tell the news.
I care not for their laurels but would choose
On the world's field to fight or fall or run.
My soul's ambition will not take excuse
To play the dial rather than the sun.
The faith I held I hold, as when a boy
I left my books for cricket-bat and gun.
The tales of poets are but scholars' themes.
In my hot youth I held it that a man
With heart to dare and stomach to enjoy
Had better work to his hand in any plan
Of any folly, so the thing were done,
Than in the noblest dreaming of mere dreams.

ON THE SHORTNESS OF TIME

lxv

If I could live without the thought of death,
Forgetful of Time's waste, the soul's decay,
I would not ask for other joy than breath
With light and sound of birds and the sun's ray.
I could sit on untroubled day by day
Watching the grass grow, and the wild flowers range
From blue to yellow and from red to grey
In natural sequence as the seasons change.
I could afford to wait, but for the hurt
Of this dull tick of time which chides my ear.
But now I dare not sit with loins ungirt
And staff unlifted, for Death stands too near.
I must be up and doing—ay, each minute.
The grave gives time for rest when we are in it.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

CHANCLEBURY RING

lxvi

SAY what you will, there is not in the world
A nobler sight than from this upper down.
No rugged landscape here, no beauty hurled
From its Creator's hand as with a frown ;
But a green plain on which green hills look down
Trim as a garden plot. No other hue
Can hence be seen, save here and there the brown
Of a square fallow, and the horizon's blue.
Dear checker-work of woods, the Sussex weald.
If a name thrills me yet of things of earth,
That name is thine ! How often I have fled
To thy deep hedgerows and embraced each field,
Each lag, each pasture,—fields which gave me birth
And saw my youth, and which must hold me dead.

SONNET IN ASSONANCE

lxvij

A THOUSAND bluebells blossom in the wood,
Shut in a tangled brake of briar roses,
And guarded well from every wanton foot,
A treasure by no eye of man beholden,—
No eye but mine. No other tongue hath spoken
Out to the joyless world what hidden joys
Lie there untasted, mines of wealth unnoted,
While a starved world without lives blank and void.
—Ah, couldst thou know, poor wretch, what I have
known,
See what I saw upon that bank enshrined,
Soft pity had not wholly left thy soul,
And tears had dimmed thy hard eyes uninvited—
Eyes that are cruel-bright with hunger's brightness,—
Hunger for beauty, solitude, and peace !
There hadst thou found a beauty and a silence,
Such as nor tongue can tell nor fancy dream.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

YOUTH

lxvii]

YOUTH, ageless youth, the old gods' attribute !
—To inherit cheeks a-tingle with such blood
As wood-nymphs blushed, who to the first-blown flute
Went out in endless dancing through the wood.
To live, and taste of that immortal food
After the wild day's waste prepared for us
By deathless hands, and straightway be renewed,
Like the god's entrails upon Caucasus.
To rise at dawn with eye and brain and sense
Clear as the pale green edge where dawn began,
While each bold thought full shapen should arise,
Cutting the horizon of experience,
Sharp as an obelisk.—Ah, wretched man,
'Tis little wonder that the gods are wise !

AGE

lxix

I

O AGE, thou art the very thief of joy,
For thou hast rifled many a proud fool
Of all his passions, hoarded by a rule
Of stern economy. Him, yet a boy,
Harsh wisdom governed. Others turned to toy
With lusty passion. He was chaste and cool
As a young Dorian in Lycurgus' school.
Ah me, that thou such souls shouldst dare annoy.
Thus did he gather him a store of pleasure,
Nor cared to touch what he so hardly won,
But led long years of solitary strife ;
And, when the rest should have consumed their treasure,
He thought to sit him in the evening sun
And taste the sweet fruits of a sober life.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

II

But thou didst come upon him ere he wist,
A silent highwayman, and take his all
And leave him naked, when the night should fall
And all the road was conjured in a mist.
Too well thou keepedst thy unholy tryst,
As long ago that eastern seneschal
Rode all day long to meet at evenfall
Him he had fled ere yet the sun uprist.
—But I have spent me like a prodigal
The treasure of my youth, and, long ago,
Have eaten husks among the hungry swine,
And when I meet thee I will straightway fall
Upon thy neck, and if the tears shall flow,
They shall be tears of love for thee and thine.

THE VENUS OF MILO

lxx

WHAT art thou? Woman? Goddess? Aphrodite?
Yet never such as thou from the cold foam
Of ocean, nor from cloudy heaven might come,
Who wast begotten on her bridal-night
In passionate Earth's womb by Man's delight,
When man was young. I cannot trace in thee
Time's handiwork. Say, rather, where is he
For whom thy face was red which is so white?
Thou standest ravished, broken, and thy face
Is writ with ancient passions. Thou art dumb
To my new love. Yet, whatsoe'er of good,
Of crime, of pride, of passion, or of grace
In woman is, thou, woman, hast in sum!
Earth's archetypal Eve! All Womanhood.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

WRITTEN AT FLORENCE

lxxi

I

O WORLD, in very truth thou art too young,
When wilt thou learn to wear the garb of age?
World, with thy covering of yellow flowers,
Hast thou forgot what generations sprung
Out of thy loins and loved thee and are gone?
Hast thou no place in all their heritage
Where thou dost only weep that I may come
Nor fear the mockery of thy yellow flowers?
O world, in very truth thou art too young.
The heroic wealth of passionate emprise
Built thee fair cities for thy naked plains.
How hast thou set thy summer growth among
The broken stones which were their palaces!
Hast thou forgot the darkness where *he* lies
Who made thee beautiful, or have thy bees
Found out his grave to build their honeycombs?

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

II

O world, in very truth thou art too young,
They gave thee love who measured out thy skies,
And, when they found for thee another star,
Who made a festival and straightway hung
The jewel on thy neck. O merry world,
Hast thou forgot the glory of those eyes
Which first looked love in thine? Thou hast not furled
One banner of thy bridal car for them.

O world, in very truth thou art too young.
There was a voice which sang about thy spring,
Till winter froze the sweetness of his lips,
And lo, the worms had hardly left his tongue
Before thy nightingales were come again.

O world, what courage hast thou thus to sing?
Say, has thy merriment no secret pain,
No sudden weariness that thou art young?

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

PALAZZO PAGANI

lxxij

THIS is the house where, twenty years ago,
They spent a spring and summer. This shut gate
Would lead you to the terrace, and below
To a rose garden long since desolate.
Here they once lived. How often I have sat
Till it was dusk among the olive-trees,
Waiting to hear their coming horse-hoofs grate
Upon the gravel ; till the freshening breeze
Bore down a sound of voices. Even yet
A broken echo of their laughter rings
Through the deserted terraces. And see,
While I am speaking, from the parapet
There is a hand put forth, and some one flings
Her very window open overhead.
How sweet it is, this scent of rosemary !
These are the last tears I shall ever shed.

THE SUBLIME

lxxiij

I

To stand upon a windy pinnacle,
Beneath the infinite blue of the blue noon,
And underfoot a valley terrible
As that dim gulf, where sense and being swoon
When the soul parts ; a giant valley strewn
With giant rocks ; asleep, and vast, and still,
And far away. The torrent, which has hewn
His pathway through the entrails of the hill,
Now crawls along the bottom and anon
Lifts up his voice, a muffled tremulous roar,
Borne on the wind an instant, and then gone
Back to the caverns of the middle air ;
A voice as of a nation overthrown
With beat of drums, when hosts have marched to war.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

II

Clutching the brink with hands and feet and knees,
With trembling heart, and eyes grown strangely dim,
A part thyself and parcel of the frieze
Of that colossal temple raised to Time,
To gaze on horror, till, as in a crime,
Thou and the rocks become accomplices.
There is no voice, no life 'twixt thee and them.
No life ! Yet, look, far down upon the breeze
Something has passed across the bosom bare
Of the red rocks, a leaf, a shape, a shade.
A living shadow ! ay, above thee there,
Weaving majestic circles overhead,
Others are watching.—This is the sublime :
To be alone, with eagles in the air.

A FOREST IN BOSNIA

lxxiv

SPIRIT of Trajan ! What a world is here,
What remnant of old Europe in this wood,
Of life primæval rude as in the year
When thy first legions by the Danube stood.
These are the very Dacians they subdued,
Swineherds and shepherds clad in skins of deer
And fox and marten still, a bestial brood,
Than their own swine begotten swinelier.
The fair oak-forest, their first heritage,
Pastures them still, and still the hollow oak
Receives them in its bosom. Still o'erhead
Upon the stag-head tops, grown hoar with age,
Calm buzzards sit and ancient ravens croak,
And all with solemn life is tenanted.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

ROUMELI HISSAR

lxxv

A SONNET

THE empire of the East, grown dull to fear
By long companionship with angry fate,
In silent anguish saw her doom appear
In this dark fortress built upon the strait,
And Sultan Mahmoud standing at her gate,
For she must perish. Hissar many a year
Struck terror into all who gazed thereat,
Till in his turn the Turk had learned to wear
The purple and fine linen of the State,
And fell in impotence. These walls to-day,
With Judas tree and lilac overgrown,
Move all men's hearts. For close on barbarous power
Tread lust and indolence, and then decay
Till we forgive.—The very German boor,
Who in his day of fortune moves our scorn,
Purged of his slough, in after ages may
Invite the tears of nations yet unborn.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

THE OASIS OF SIDI KHALED

lxxvi

How the earth burns ! Each pebble underfoot
Is as a living thing with power to wound.
The white sand quivers, and the footfall mute
Of the slow camels strikes but gives no sound,
As though they walked on flame, not solid ground.
'Tis noon, and the beasts' shadows even have fled
Back to their feet, and there is fire around
And fire beneath, and overhead the sun.
Pitiful heaven ! What is this we view ?
Tall trees, a river, pools, where swallows fly,
Thickets of oleander where doves coo,
Shades deep as midnight, greenness for tired eyes.
Hark, how the light winds in the palm-tops sigh.
Oh this is rest. Oh this is paradise.

TO THE BEDOUIN ARABS

lxxvij

CHILDREN of Shem ! Firstborn of Noah's race,
But still for ever children ; at the door
Of Eden found, unconscious of disgrace,
And loitering on while all are gone before ;
Too proud to dig ; too careless to be poor ;
Taking the gifts of God in thanklessness,
Not rendering aught, nor supplicating more,
Nor arguing with Him when He hides His face.
Yours is the rain and sunshine, and the way
Of an old wisdom by our world forgot,
The courage of a day which knew not death.
Well may we sons of Japhet in dismay
Pause in our vain mad fight for life and breath,
Beholding you. I bow and reason not.

LOVE SONNETS OF PROTEUS

GIBRALTAR

lxxviiij

SEVEN weeks of sea, and twice seven days of storm
Upon the huge Atlantic, and once more
We ride into still water and the calm
Of a sweet evening, screened by either shore
Of Spain and Barbary. Our toils are o'er,
Our exile is accomplished. Once again
We look on Europe, mistress as of yore
Of the fair earth and of the hearts of men.
Ay, this is the famed rock, which Hercules
And Goth and Moor bequeathed us. At this door
England stands sentry. God! to hear the shrill
Sweet treble of her fifes upon the breeze,
And at the summons of the rock gun's roar
To see her red coats marching from the hill!

ESTHER

A YOUNG MAN'S TRAGEDY

I

WHEN is life other than a tragedy,
Whether it is played in tears from the first scene,
In sable robes and grief's mute pageantry,
For loves that died ere they had ever been,
Or whether on the edge of joys set keen,
While all the stage with laughter is agog,
Death stepping forward with an altered mien
Pulls off his mask, and speaks the epilogue?
Life is a play acted by dying men,
Where, if its heroes seem to foot it well
And go light-tongued without grimace of pain,
Death will be found anon. And who shall tell
Which part was saddest, or in youth or age,
When the tired actor stops and leaves the stage?

ESTHER

II

Yes, who shall tell the value of our tears,
Whether we wept aright or idly grieved ?
There is a tragedy in unloved years,
And in those passionate hours by love deceived,
In lips un-kissed and hopes too soon bereaved,
And youth's high courage which no strength could save,
And manhood's web of fate by folly weaved,
And grey-haired grief brought down into the grave.
Who shall distinguish truly and be wise
'Twixt grief and grief, 'twixt night and night ? The sun
Has its own sorrow and a voice that cries
Louder than darkness of its joys undone,
And pleads with that exceeding bitter cry,
"I have tasted honey, and behold, I die !"

III

A little honey ! Ay, a little sweet,
A little pleasure when the years were young,
A joyous measure trod by dancing feet,
A tale of folly told by a loved tongue,—
These are the things by which our hearts are wrung
More than by tears. Oh, I would rather laugh,
So I had not to choose such tales among
Which was most laughable. Man's nobler half
Resents mere sorrow. I would rather sit
With just the common crowd that watch the play
And mock at harlequin and the clown's wit,
And call it tragedy and go my way.
I should not err, because the tragic part
Lay not in these, but sealed in my own heart.

ESTHER

IV

And thus it is. The tale I have to tell
Is such another. He who reads shall find
That which he brings to it of heaven or hell
For his best recompense where much is blind,
A jest-book or a sermon or mere wind,—
Each as he may,—for life's least godly mirth
Is mingled strangely here with fate unkind,
And this is a true story of the Earth.
The passionate heart of youth with its desires
Is not all noble, and some baseness clings
For ever mixed with its eternal fires,
Else were it single among human things.
And all life's wisdom learns but this last plan,
To jest at tears and weep man's mirth and man.

V

I linger on the threshold of my youth.
If you could see me now as then I was,
A fair-faced frightened boy with eyes of truth
Scared at the world yet angry at its laws,
Plotting all plots, a blushing Catiline
Betrayed by his own cheeks, a misanthrope
In love with all things human and divine,
The very fool of fortune and high hope,
You would deny you knew me. Oh the days
Of our absurd first manhood, rich in force,
Rich in desire of happiness and praise
Yet impotent in its heroic course,
And all for lack of that one worthless thing,
Knowledge of life and love and suffering !

ESTHER

VI

At such an hour indeed of youth's first morn,
There is a heaving of the soul in pain,
A mighty labour as of joys unborn,
Which grieves it and disquiets it in vain.
The soul is scared at her own lack of peace,
Her cradle song is mute, and she has fled
From her old life as to a wilderness.
She finds herself awake and without bread.
'Tis then the body, her new counsellor,
Speaks in her ear, and still with eloquence
Pleads for more action, and his voice to her
Is sweet with love, and sadly she consents.
There is a day of youth which needs must come
When each must learn his life and leave his home.

VII

The summer I had passed in my own fashion
High in the Alps, a proselyte to toil.
I was released and free, and spent my passion
On the bare rocks as on a fruitful soil.
I had soothed my soul with labour, and its fire
Borne to those naked heights where I unfurled
My flag with new ambitions, high and higher
Even to the last bleak outposts of the world.
My soul had needed courage, and behold !
Here in these battles with the hosts of air
And rock and snow and storm she had grown bold
And proved her temper for the coming war.
This was her gain, the strife she must engage
With physical fear, her childhood's heritage.

ESTHER

VIII

A glorious triumph. On that day of days
When, standing on the summit's utmost edge
Of my first mountain-top, I viewed the maze
Which I had travelled upwards, ledge on ledge,
And all that wilderness of rock and plain
Rolled at my feet, and, when with heel fast set
On Nature's neck, I knew the giant slain,
My thrall, my prisoner, on the parapet,
I was transfigured. Slowly in me rose
The throb of courage as a sense new born.
"Even man," I cried, "man's self, my foe of foes,
The phantom of my fears, shall feel my scorn
Yet in a nobler war." And trembling then
I seemed to stand, I, too, a man with men.

IX

Thus was my soul enfranchised. But anon,
With courage fired to full-fledged enterprise,
And pushing still the vantage I had won,
I sought communion with a world less wise,
The living world. I mixed with not a few,
Shepherds and countrymen, and village priests,
Bagmen at inns, and all the motley crew
Which comes and goes on market-days and feasts
In old-world hostelries of old-world towns.
These gave a second schooling, till the grace
Of the summer ended on the upper downs,
And, carrying still its glory on my face
I came to Lyons, where these things befell.
The why and wherefore of it who shall tell?

ESTHER

x

I had been an hour at Lyons. My breath comes
Fast when I think of it. An hour, no more,
I trod those streets and listened to the drums,
The mirth, the music, and the city's roar,
And found no sermon for me in her stones.
It was the evening of St. Martin's fair,
And all the world, its working bees and drones,
Had gone out to the quays in the sweet air,
To taste that thing more sweet to human breath,
Its own mad laughter at its own mad kind.
"An hour of prayer," I mused, "for men of faith."
Yet all these worshippers were only blind.
And I, no whit less blind, among them went
In search of pleasure for my punishment.

xi

The Lyons fair! In truth it was a heaven
For idlers' eyes, a feast of curious things.
Swings, roundabouts, and shows, the Champions Seven,
Dramas of battles and the deaths of kings,
The whole Place d'Armes grown white as if with snow,
With canvas booths arrayed in triple lines,
And jugglers, lions, snakes from Mexico,
Dancers on tight-ropes, clowns and columbines.
I went among them all with grave intent,
I, too, to find it may be some delight.
I was a boy and knew not what life meant,
Nor what the pleasures were men seek in it.
Only I knew that mingling with that throng,
I was a stranger a strange world among.

ESTHER

XII

I had made my round, as yet with little gain
Of undiscovered good in that gay place.
I had sought my share of pleasure, but in vain.
Laughter was not for me, and hid her face.
I had asked for mirth. The oracles were dumb.
No sound of folly with her tinkling feet
Had bid my own feet follow, and no home
Was mine for merriment or musings sweet.
I had ceased to hope and almost ceased to seek,
When, from the farthest booth of all, the bray
Of brass and drums and fiddling and the shriek
Of a dwarf's voice invited me to stay.
The crowd, as scenting some more mirthful thing,
Surged round that booth agape and wondering.

XIII

It was a booth no larger than the rest,
No loftier fashioned and no more sublime,
As poor a shrine as ever youth possessed
In which to worship truth revealed in time.
Yet to my soul the mean remembrance clings
With all the folly of that far fair eve,
And my pulse throbs with lost imaginings,
And passion rises from its grave to grieve.
Vain dreams, brute images! and over all
The shrill-voiced dwarf its hierarch and priest,
Vaunting its praise, a pagan prince of Baal.
It scared me as of some wild idol feast.
"The Booth of Beauty," thus it was I read,
Blazoned in scarlet letters overhead.

ESTHER

XIV

I stopped, I listened, and I entered in,
With half a dozen more, that sight to see.
"The Booth of Beauty," 'twas a name of sin
Which seemed to promise a new mystery.
There was a crowd already in the place,
And 'twixt me and the stage, now darkly hid,
The gathering evening had come down apace,
And all was dim within and overspread.
I know not by what instinct or mute proof
Of Providence it was, but this is true,
Even as I stepped 'neath that ignoble roof,
A prescience warned me there of portents new,
And a voice spoke with no uncertain sound
Warning me back as from ungodly ground.

XV

An instant, just an instant, and no more,
And it was gone, and I with eyes unsealed
Saw the bald pageant stripped to its thought's core,
And naked there to my scared eyes revealed.
Upon a throne which filled the upper space
Two female monsters sat, the first a girl
Marked like a leopard with pied arms and face,
And restless eyes aflame and teeth of pearl.
Her as we ventured near, I heard awhile
Say she was hungry, and a gleam like blood
Lighted her lips and died in a fierce smile.
A woman's hand behind me in the crowd
Clutched at my arm, and through the booth there went
A shiver of half fear, half merriment.

ESTHER

XVI

Beyond her sat a second monster. She
In shape and sense was undisguisedly real,
An ox-eyed queen of full-fed majesty
And giant height and comeliness ideal.
She too her tale related, as was due,
In measured tones, her age, her birth, her name,
Bourgeois her parents, friends of order too,
And good Imperialists of honest fame,
Her age eighteen, her height seven feet, her waist
An ell and more in its circumference,
Her leg above the knee, and where was placed
Its point of full development. . . . The sense
Of the rest I lost, for laughing half aloud
Again a woman touched me in the crowd.

XVII

She was a little woman dressed in black,
Who stood on tiptoe with a childish air,
Her face and figure hidden in a "sacque,"
All but her eyes and forehead and dark hair.
Her brow was pale, but it was lit with light,
And mirth flashed out of it, it seemed in rays.
A childish face, but wise with woman's wit,
And something, too, pathetic in its gaze.
In the bare dusk of that unseemly place
I noted all, and this besides, a scar
Which on her cheek had left a paler trace.
It seemed to tell its tale of love and war.
That little scar !' Doubt whispered of this one,
Boy as I was, she had not lived a nun.

ESTHER

XVIII

A second warning, nor unheeded. Yet
The thought appealed to me as no strange thing,
Pure though I was, that love impure had set
Its seal on that fair woman in her Spring.
Her broken beauty did not mar her grace
In form or spirit. Nay, it rather moved.
It seemed a natural thing for that gay face
It should have known and suffered and been loved.
It kindled in me, too, to view it thus,
A mood of daring which was more than mine
And made my shamefaced heart leap valorous,
And fired its courage to a zeal divine.
All this, in one short instant, as I gazed
Into her eyes, admiring, yet amazed.

XIX

Me, too, she doubtless read. For, with her hand
Raised as for help and pointing to a chair,
She bade me, with a gesture, part command
And part entreaty, I would set her there.
She could not see, she said, the Queen of Love
My eyes so coveted, and laughed and laid
Upon my lips the fingers of her glove
When I protested at the words she said.
I hardly knew how it all came about
But did her bidding as she would, and she
From her new vantage bore the humour out
And mocked the more at each new mockery.
And still she held my arm and I her dress,
“Lest she should fall,” she said, in waywardness.

ESTHER

XX

Thus it began with laughter. But anon
The ox-eyed queen, who had resumed by rote
The tale of her perfections one by one,
Turned by some ominous chance towards the spot
Where we two stood. "And take good note," said she,
"All here is honest beauty, flesh and blood,
As any in the world. Yet, if there be
A doubt between you, let me make it good.
Which of you two will honour me so near
As to prove the truth?" My cheeks in spite of me
Flamed in the dark, and I was seized with fear
And a wild doubt lest mine the choice should be.
The little woman on the chair began
To shout aloud and bid me play the man.

XXI

Oh, 'tis a terrible thing in early youth
To be assailed by laughter and mute shame,
A terrible thing to be befooled forsooth
By one's own foolish face betrayed in flame.
The little traitor, when she saw me dumb,
Went on to clap her hands, till all and each
Took up the jest and called on me to come
And prove my courage in the manly breach.
The imperious queen stood waiting for me there,
Pointing and beckoning, and the crowd closed in,
Under the cover of a wilder air
From the brass band, the darkness and the din,
I know not how it was, with shame all red,
I broke from her away and turned and fled.

ESTHER

XXII

I fled into the bosom of the night,
Leaving the Fair behind me. I had need
Of the sweet healing darkness to my sight,
As a bruise needs a poultice. And in speed
I went thus half through Lyons, loath to win
Back to the crowd, and doubly loath to go
Thus foolishly transfigured to my inn.
Strange fateful night! Even to this hour 'tis so.
Night in a city with the distant hum
Of laughing crowds, the silence of strange streets,
My own mute footfalls and the redolent gloom
Of oil-lit thresholds brings it back and cheats
My sorrow still to the last dreams of good
I dreamed that evening in my solitude.

XXIII

The booths were shut. The Fair was at an end,
And the crowd gone with multitudinous feet
Noisily home, or lingering still to spend
At café doors or at the turn of the street
In twos and threes its laughter with good-night.
All turned to silence. Even my heart had peace
As, self-possessed and freed from its vain fright,
I found myself once more upon the quays.
I stopped before the theatre grown dark,
With its extinguished lamps and blank repose
A scene of melancholy sad to mark,
Made sadder too by the white moon which rose
Behind it virginal with vaporous wings,
Aloof and careless of all earthly things.

ESTHER

xxiv

I had stopped to read a handbill of the play,
Caught by the lettering. Thus it was I read,
“ Programme of this night’s pieces, Saturday,
The twentieth of October, ‘X. Y. Z.,’
A piece in one act, and ‘ Les Bergers Fous,’
These to be followed by the well-known ‘ drame ’
Of ‘ Manon Lescaut,’ here brought out anew
For the first time at Lyons.” And a name
Followed in giant type of one who then
Illustrious stood in all the world of folly,
The most sublime comedian known to men,
“ Mademoiselle Esther, Muse of Melancholy.”
She in her part of Manon, so ’twas writ,
Three nights would play in honour infinite.

xxv

Such was the legend. I had read it through
Twice e’er I thought of thinking what it meant.
And as I turned with a sigh because I knew
That I alone perhaps of all who went
Homewards that night should bid good-night to none,
From a side door thrust open on the street
And calling as she passed in petulant tone
To one within who seemed to rouse her heat,
“ Ah, mauvais plaisant !” ere she slammed it to,
Out stepped my little woman of the Fair.
Her face was altered, but its form and hue,
If I had doubted in the moonlight there,
Was marked for me by that unaltered sign,
The little scar, its beauty’s underline.

ESTHER

XXVI

She saw me in an instant, and stopped short
With a sudden change of look from fierce to gay,
Her black eyes gleamed with triumph as they caught,
Like some wild bird of chase, their natural prey.
"Ha, ha!" she cried, "c'est lui, c'est l'ingénu.
Ah, vagabond! 'Tis thus you find me out.
Standing 'en faction,' and at midnight too,
At the actor's door, with no more fear or doubt
Than any sinner of them all. Oh wise!
Who would have guessed it? No. You shall not speak.
You shall not soil your innocent lips with lies
For any foolish reason in the week,
Nor for the year together if you told
Your stories here till both of us grew old.

XXVII

"Silence. I will not listen!" "And for what?"
She added strangely, in a softer mood.
"You see I am not angry. Do you not?
Only soft-hearted, and alas! too good.
Why did you follow me?" She took my hand
With a sudden action so devoid of guile
That I, who could not choose but understand,
Was softened too and fooled into a smile.
"Why did you follow me? Here, feel," she said,
"How my heart beats. It frightens me to find
So much of cunning in so young a head,
So young a heart,—and mine which is not blind!"
She pressed my hand to her side. In truth, her heart
Was beating there, my own heart's counterpart.

ESTHER

XXVIII

She watched me curiously with mocking eyes,
Yet tenderly, till once again her mirth
Prevailed with her, and quick in feigned surprise
Thrusting me back, "Ah, traitor!" she broke forth,
"Twas not for me then you were waiting there,
Not me, poor foolish me. The Queen of Love,
The woman of the booth! She was your care!
Monster! to dare me thus! And yet you prove
Your wit in vain, for, look, you foolish boy,
She cannot walk the streets like you and me,
Or the town would be at her heels." Convulsed with joy
At this new jest she laughed remorselessly,
Till I was almost angry and inclined
To leave her there. And then she changed her mind.

XXIX

She seemed to change as if with a change of the wind,
And growing serious sighed. "Now look," she said,
"You think me a mad woman and unkind,
But that is nonsense. I am sound of head
And not unsound of heart, ah, no, not there!
But you turn my head with your John the Baptist's face.
I will not be made jealous, so beware."
She looked entreatingly as if for grace,
And held me by the arm. "We are strangers both
Among these heavy Lyonnese. By right
We so should hold together. Tell me truth.
You never saw me, did you, till to-night?"
I said, "I came here not twelve hours ago!
Why should you think it?" "No," she broke in, "no,

ESTHER

xxx

“I do not doubt it. You have a look of truth
Which is beyond suspicion. But the world
Is as full of knaves as fools. You have your youth
And I my wisdom. Then your head is curled
Just as I like it, and your face is smooth,
And it can blush like your red innocent hands.
I saw it in an instant in the booth
That we should know each other and be friends.
It does not do to question. Look at me.
I am not pretty, yet the world's best sense
Has raved about my beauty foolishly
These five years past in every mood and tense !
Say. Would you like we should be friends for good ? ”
Not knowing what I said, I said I would.

xxxI

“We shall be friends. How friends? You must know me first.
What? Like the Pont Neuf? Should you wish it? Well,
None ever yet repented it who durst.
Oh! you shall know me as I dare not tell.
You said I was not pretty. 'Tis the paint
That ruins the complexion and the hours
Spent at the footlights. These would rob a saint,
Much more a sinner, of her natural powers.
Voilà la casse du métier! Then, this scar,
Some praise it as a beauty. They are fools.
At best it but an honour is of war,
And beauty is not measured by foot-rules.
So you forgive it me, what need we care?
Fair faces are but signs of things more fair.”

ESTHER

XXXII

She went on talking like a running stream,
Without more reason or more pause or stay
Than to gather breath and then pursue her whim
Just where it led her, tender, sad, or gay.
Her moods seemed all alike to her. But soon
With a little shudder, for the wind was chill
And we had lingered on there in the moon,
She bade me follow, and I bowed my will.
The torrent of her words had drowned in me
What humour of resistance there had been,
And the last sense of danger ceased to be
In the first joy of yielding to such sin.
There is no pleasure in the world so sweet
As, being wise, to fall at folly's feet.

XXXIII

Who might describe the humours of that night,
The mirth, the tragedy, the grave surprise,
The treasures of fair folly infinite
Learned as a lesson from those childlike eyes?
When we had left our river of fair hope,
The world once more engulfed us in its ways,
And street on street we passed, and shop on shop,
Still loitering by to peer within and praise.
At each new stall we stopped as if in doubt,
Asking a price, and in pretence to buy.
I thought she would have worn men's patience out
With her fool's talk while I stood idly by.
And still, as each grew warm, with cunning word
She turned their wrath from surly to absurd.

ESTHER

XXXIV

And so we went our way,—yes, hand in hand,
Like two lost children in some magic wood
Baffled and baffling with enchanter's wand
The various beasts that crossed us and withstood
Each step was an experience. Every mood
Of that fair woman a fresh gospelling,
Which spoke aloud to me and stirred my blood
To a new faith, I knew not with what sting.
One thing alone I knew or cared to know,
Her strange companionship thus strangely won.
The past, the future, all of weal or woe
In my old life was gone, for ever gone.
And still to this I clung as one who clings
To hope's last hencoop in the wreck of things.

XXXV

How shall I tell my fall? The life of man
Is but a tale of tumbles, this way thrown
At his beginning by mere haste of plan
In the first gaping ditch with flowers o'ergrown;
Anon more cautious for his wounded knees,
Yet falling still through much expectancy;
And so to age, the goal of his heart's ease,
Stumbling in blindness on he knows not why.
How shall I tell it? As the poets tell
Who wrap love in a garment of vain light,
Or plainly naked, the poor child of hell
And laughter that it is and starless night?
I like the truth best. Yet this love, sad thing,
Mired and defiled, I saw it once a king.

ESTHER

XXXVI

We came at last, alas ! I see it yet,
With its open windows on the upper floor,
To a certain house still stirring, with lights set,
And just a chink left open of the door.
Here my companion stopped and bade me in ;
Her dressmaker's, she said. And I, who heard
A sound of women's voices from within,
Shrank back alarmed and ready at a word
From any damsel stoutly to deny.
But " Madame Blanche," she said to ease my fears,
" Is a good soul, and far too wise to pry
Or fancy evil of her customers
At any hour of the night they choose to come,
Much less of me." And so I followed dumb.

XXXVII

I followed dumb and shrinking like a thief
Close in her shadow from the women's guess,
Yet ruthlessly betrayed for my cheeks' grief
From head to foot in the tall pier-glasses.
My vagabond attire, my coat all rags,
My tattered plaid stained with the summer's dust,
The sash which bound my waist all gaps and jags,
With gaiters frayed and such sad shoes as must
Have served Ulysses at his journey's close ;
All these I saw revealed to my disgrace,
My hat still crowned with its last Alpine rose,
And what she had called my " John the Baptist's face "
Red with confusion and the rage of youth,
I saw it all, the whole remorseless truth.

ESTHER

XXXVIII

Not so my little sponsor. She, with eyes
Proudly unconscious of my fool's display,
Talked volubly to all and scorned disguise,
While Madame Blanche herself, no less than they,
Smiled us a welcome, and with upraised hands
Disclaimed excuse and led us straightway through
To an inner room as to a Conference.

There I first saw to my amazement new
That fair white mystery, a woman's dress,
And heard its language spoken. Stuff were brought
And cards unrolled before us, braids and lace
Lauded and handled and their merits taught
To ears that listened and to eyes that saw
Their secret sense, the law within the law.

XXXIX

Sublime discussions ! Let who will be wise !
These are the things that touch us and transcend.
The logic of all beauty is surprise,
The reason of all love the unseen end.
Still as they argued on of this and that,
Turning perchance to me as arbiter
Where in my corner I still speechless sat
To end their strife, my vision seemed to clear.
The scales fell from my eyes of ignorance,
The terror from my heart. One thing alone
Stood plain before me, the supreme fair chance
Of a first fortune, glorious and unknown,
Which beckoned me with no uncertain hand
To touch and taste and learn and understand.

ESTHER

XL

He who has once been happy is for aye
Out of destruction's reach. His fortune then
Holds nothing secret, and Eternity,
Which is a mystery to other men,
Has like a woman given him its joy.
Time is his conquest. Life, if it should fret,
Has paid him tribute. He can bear to die.
He who has once been happy! When I set
The world before me and survey its range,
Its mean ambitions, its scant fantasies,
The shreds of pleasure which for lack of change
Men wrap around them and call happiness,
The poor delights which are the tale and sum
Of the world's courage in its martyrdom,

XLI

When I hear laughter from a tavern door,
When I see crowds agape and in the rain
Watching on tiptoe and with stifled roar
To see a rocket fired or a bull slain,
When misers handle gold, when orators
Touch strong men's hearts with glory till they weep,
When cities deck their streets for barren wars
Which have laid waste their youth, and when I keep
Calmly the count of my own life and see
On what poor stuff my manhood's dreams were fed
Till I too learned what dole of vanity
Will serve a human soul for daily bread,
—Then I remember that I once was young
And lived with Esther the world's gods among.

ESTHER

XLII

I lived with Esther, not for many days,
If days be counted by the fall of night
And the sun's rising, yet through years of praise,
If truth be timepiece of joys infinite.
And what a life it was! No vain sweet dream
Of love in idleness which all men know,
But a full drama fashioned on the theme
Of strength victorious over death and woe.
Here was no faltering. Ours the triumph was
Of that strong logic which beholds each day
As a new world to conquer, and the cause
Itself complete of a more glorious fray.
To-day our cycle was. In it sublime
We sat enthroned as on the neck of Time.

XLIII

For Esther was a woman most complete
In all her ways of loving. And with me
Dealt as one deals who careless of deceit
And rich in all things is of all things free.
She did not stop with me to feel her way
Into my heart, because she all hearts knew,
But, like some prodigal heir of yesterday
Just in possession, counted not her due
And grandly gave. O brave humility!
O joy that kneels! O pride that stoops to tears!
She spent where others had demanded fee,
Served where all service had of right been hers,
Casting her bread of life upon love's ways,
Content to find it after many days.

ESTHER

XLIV

I must not speak of it. Even yet my heart
Is but a feeble thing to fret and cry,
And it might chance to wake and with a start,
When nights were still and stars were in the sky,
Sit up and muse upon its lonely state,
With the same stars to mock at it as then,
And certain chords that touched might touch it yet,
And griefs find issue and tears come again.
I must not venture farther in this mood.
Grief is forsworn to me. I will not grieve,
Nor think too much on Esther's womanhood,
Rather on that which was its make-believe.
And yet awhile she loved me. In this thought
I long found rest when all was come to nought.

XLV

We stayed at Lyons three days, only three,
In Esther's world of wonder and renown,
She, glorious star, each night immortally
Playing her Manons to the listening town.
I glorious too, but in Love's firmament,
Watching her face by which alone I moved,
A shadow near her raptured and intent,
And seeking still the signs that I was loved.
Thrice happy days! Thrice blessed tragedy!
Her Des Grieux was I, her lover lorn
Bound to her fortunes, blest to live or die,
And faithful ever though to faith forsworn,
Waiting behind the scenes in that stage-land
To greet her exits and to squeeze her hand.

ESTHER

XLVI

Who has not wept with Manon? Of all tales
That thrill youth's fancy or to tears or mirth
None other is there where such grief prevails,
Such passionate pity for the loves of Earth.
Who has not wept with Manon in her sin,
Wept in her punishment? What angry heart
Has been unmoved in youth to see her win
With those sad archers to the inhuman cart?
Who has not followed her beyond the seas,
And sold his life for her, and bowed his pride,
And sinned all sins to buy her back to ease,
And died all deaths to venge her when she died?
And I, blest boy, who each new happy night
When all was done still lived in her delight!

XLVII

This was my term of glory. All who know
Something of life will guess untold the end.
In love, one ever kisses for his woe,
One lends his cheek, alas! or seems to lend,
One has the pleasure, one the penalties,
One is in earnest, one has time to laugh,
One turns impatient from imploring eyes,
And one in terror spells love's epitaph.
There was no wisdom in this love of mine,
Therefore it perished earlier than the rest,
Although I poured out all my heart like wine,
And watered it with tears, and prayed unblest
In my soul's rage to all the Saints of heaven
To give me this and yet to be forgiven.

ESTHER

XLVIII

It might not be. Some things are possible,
And some impossible for even God.
And Esther had no soul which Heaven or Hell
Could touch by joy or soften by the rod.
She could not really love me. The day came,
How soon, how late, I need not to devise,
When passion prayed its last, and only shame
Stood for my portion in a world grown wise,
And I went forth for ever from her sight
Knowing the good and evil. On that day
I did her wrong by anger. Now life's light
Illumines all, and I behold her gay
As I first knew her in my love purblind,
Dear passionate Esther, soulless but how kind !

THE IDLER'S CALENDAR

January — COVER SHOOTING

THE week at Whinwood next to Christmas week.
Six guns, no more, but all good men and true,
Of the clean-visaged sort, with ruddy cheek
Which knows not care. Light-hearted Montagu
At the cover's end, as down the wind they flew,
Has stopped his score of pheasants, every beak,
Without more thought of Juliet than of you ;
And still I hear his loud-mouthed Purdeys speak.
Tybalt and Paris, with a bet on hand,
Have fired at the same woodcock. "Truce," say I,
"To civil jars,"—for look, as by command,
Bunch following bunch, a hundred pheasants fly.
Now battle, murder, death on every side !
Right, left, left, right, we pile up agony,
Till night stops all. Then home in chastened pride,
With aching heads, our slaughter satisfied.

THE IDLER'S CALENDAR

February UNDER THE SPEAKER'S GALLERY

In all the comedy of human things
What is more mirthful than for those, who sit
Far from the great world's vain imaginings,
To mingle in its war of words and wit,
A listener here, when Greek meets Greek, Fox P
At question time in the Queen's Parliament?
'Tis the arena of old Rome. Here meet
More than mere Dacians on mere slaughter bent.
Yonder and close to Mr. Speaker's chair,
Enfolding all things in a net of words,
Stands our first gymnast. Let the rest beware.
The Tory Stafford, with voice sweet as bird's
Shall answer him anon, or bolder borne
And if luck favours, from the nether herds
A voice of patriot wrath shall rise in scorn,
Or even young Cassius blow his windy horn.

THE IDLER'S CALENDAR

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THE IDLER'S CALENDAR

March — A WEEK AT PARIS

WHEN loud March from the east begins to blow,
And earth and heaven are black, then off we hie
By the night train to Paris, where we know
Three windows set to the meridian sky,
A third floor in the Rue de Rivoli.
There we will stop and see the fair world move
For our sole pleasure past us, you and I,
And make pretence we are once more in love.
We need not fret at loss of pence or time,
Though father Bignon's smiles are paid in gold.
This life in idleness is more sublime
Than all our toil and all our wealth twice told.
We need not fret. To-night for us shall Faure,
Sara, Dupuis, or l'Héritier unfold
New stores of mirth and music, and once more
We two shall sup, and at the Maison d'Or.

THE IDLER'S CALENDAR

April 🐟 TROUT-FISHING

THIS morning, through my window, half awake,
I felt the south wind blow ; and presently,
With a tumultuous thrill and then a shake,
The nightingale broke forth in melody.
I rose in haste, and looked at the grey sky,
And read an omen. From its corner next
A book I drew, blest book, where fly on fly
Are all the letters of its well-thumbed text
I chose my cast, a march-brown and a dun,
And ran down to the river, chasing hope.
At the first throw a mighty trout was on,
A very Samson, fit to burst a rope.
Yet tamed by one sad hank of yielding hair
And Fate, the fisherman of king and pope,
Upon the grass he lies, and gasps the air—
Four silver pounds, sublimely fat and fair !

THE IDLER'S CALENDAR

May • THE LONDON SEASON

I STILL love London in the month of May,
By an old habit, spite of dust and din.
I love the fair adulterous world, whose way
Is by the pleasant banks of Serpentine.
I love the worshippers at fashion's shrine,
The flowers, the incense, and the pageantry
Of generations which still ask a sign
Of that dear god, whose votary am I.
I love the "greetings in the market-place,"
The jargon of the clubs. I love to view
The "gilded youth" who at the window pass,
Forever smiling smiles for ever new.
I love these men and women at their task
Of hunting pleasure. Hope, mysterious too,
Touches my arm and points, and seems to ask :
"And you, have you no Juliet in the masque?"

THE IDLER'S CALENDAR

June 🍀 A DAY AT HAMPTON COURT

It is our custom, once in every year,
Mine and two others', when the chestnut-trees
Are white at Bushey, Ascot being near,
To drive to Hampton Court, and there, at ease
In that most fair of English palaces,
Spend a long summer's day. What better cheer
Than the old "Greyhound's," seek it where you please?
And where a royal garden statelier?
The morning goes in tennis, a four set,
With George the marker. 'Tis a game for gods,
Full of return and volley at the net,
And laughter and mirth-making episodes
Not wholly classic. But the afternoon
Finds us punt-fishing idly with our rods,
Nodding and half in dreams, till all too soon
Darkness and dinner drive us back to town.

THE IDLER'S CALENDAR

July — GOODWOOD

To the high breezes of the Goodwood Down
London has fled, and there awhile forgets
Its weariness of limb on lawns new-mown
And in green shadows all its wars and frets.
Thither we too will bring our calumets
In sign of peace restored o'er fashion slain,
Weaning our souls from folly with small bets
Of gloves and crowns with laughing ringwomen.
The sport is fair, luck fair, and Nature's face
Fairest of all. We neither make nor mar
A fortune here. Yet we were rich with less
Than this week's pleasure conquered from the year.
I would not for a million not have seen
Fred Archer finish upon Guinevere.
Hark ! They are off again, a half-mile spin,
Four of the dozen backed and bound to win.

THE IDLER'S CALENDAR

October 🍁 GAMBLING AT MONACO

A JEWELLED kingdom set impregnable
In gardens green which front the violet sea,
A happy fortress shut and guarded well,
And cradled ever on the mountain's knee.
Here M. Blanc, sad prince of industry,
Has reared the palace which men call his hell ;
And here in autumn days, when winds blow free,
Pleasure shall lead us to sin's citadel.
Alas for vice ! Yet, who dares moralise
In the hushed rooms, where fortune reigns alway ?
Her solemn priest, with chink of coin, replies
" Messieurs, faites votre jeu. Le jeu est fait."
Who dares be wise, lest wisdom's self be vexed ?
For all who come to preach remain to play.
Nay—leave poor vice, say I, her pleasant text,
Nor grudge her heaven in this world with the next.

THE IDLER'S CALENDAR

November ACROSS COUNTRY

NOVEMBER's here.—Once more the pink we don,
And on old Centaur, at the coverside,
Sit changing pleasant greetings one by one
With friend and neighbour. Half the county's pride
Is here to-day. Squire, parson, peer, bestride
Their stoutest nags, impatient to be gone.
Here schoolboys on their earliest ponies ride,
And village lads on asses, not outdone.
But hark! That sounds like music. Ay, by God!
He's off across the fallow. "No, sirs, no;
Not yet a minute, just another rod!
Then let him have it. Ho, there, tally-ho!"
Now that's worth seeing! Look! He's topped the wall,
Leaving his whole field pounded in a row.
A first flight place to-day was worth a fall—
So forward each, and heaven for us all!

THE IDLER'S CALENDAR

December ☞ AWAY TO EGYPT

ENOUGH, enough! This winter is too rude,
Too dark of countenance, of tooth too keen.
Nature finds rebels now in flesh and blood,
And hearts grow sick for change and eyes for green.
Let us away. What profits it that men
Are wise as gods, if winter holds its sway,
If blood be chilled, and numbness clasp the brain?
Frost is too stubborn. Let us then away!
Away to Egypt! There we may forget
All but the presence of the blessed sun.
There in our tents well-housed, sublimely set
Under a pyramid, with horse and gun,
We may make terms with Nature and, awhile,
Put as it were our souls to grass, and run
Barefooted and barehearted in the smile
Of that long summer which still girds the Nile.

WORTH FOREST

A PASTORAL

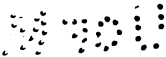
COME, Prudence, you have done enough to-day—
The worst is over, and some hours of play
We both have earned, even more than rest, from toil ;
Our minds need laughter, as a spent lamp oil,
And after their long fast a recompense.
How sweet the evening is with its fresh scents
Of briar and fern distilled by the warm wind !
How green a robe the rain has left behind !
How the birds laugh !—What say you to a walk
Over the hill, and our long-promised talk
About the rights and wrongs of infancy ?
Our patients are asleep, dear angels, she
Holding the boy in her ecstatic arms,
As mothers do, and free from past alarms,
The child grown calm. If we, an hour or two,
Venture to leave them, 'tis but our hope's due.
My tongue is all agog to try its speed
To a new listener, like a long-stalled steed
Loosed in a meadow, and the Forest lies
At hand, the theme of its best flatteries.



WORTH FOREST

See, Prudence, here, your hat, where it was thrown
The night you found me in the house alone
With my worst fear and these two helpless things.
Please God, that worst has folded its black wings,
And we may let our thoughts on pleasure run
Some moments in the light of this good sun.
They sleep in heaven's guard. Our watch to-night
Will be the braver for a transient sight—
The only one perhaps more fair than they—
Of Nature dressed for her June holiday.

This is the watershed between the Thames
And the South coast. On either hand the streams
Run to the great Thames valley and the sea.
The Downs, which should oppose them, servilely
Giving them passage. Who would think these Downs,
Which look like mountains when the sea-mist crowns
Their tops in autumn, were so poor a chain?
Yet they divide no pathways for the rain,
Nor store up waters, in this pluvius age,
More than the pasteboard barriers of a stage.
The crest lies here. From us the Medway flows
To drain the Weald of Kent, and hence the Ouse
Starts for the Channel at Newhaven. Both
These streams run eastward, bearing North and South.
But, to the West, the Adur and the Arun
Rising together, like twin rills of Sharon,
Go forth diversely, this through Shoreham gap,
And that by Arundel to ocean's lap.
All are our rivers, by our Forest bred,
And one besides which with more reverend heed
We need to speak, for her desert is great
Beyond the actual wealth of her estate,—
For Spenser sang of her, the River Mole,
And Milton knew her name, though he, poor soul,



WORTH FOREST

Had never seen her, as I think being blind,
And so miscalled her sullen. Others find
Her special merit to consist in this :
A maiden coyness, and her shy device
Of mole-like burrowing,—and in truth her way
Is hollowed out and hidden from the day,
Under deep banks and the dark overgrowth
Of knotted alder roots and stumps uncouth,
From source to mouth, and once at Mickleham,
She fairly digs her grave, in deed and name,
And disappears.—There is an early trace
Of this propensity to devious ways
Shown by the little tributary brook
Which bounds our fields, for lately it forsook
Its natural course, to burrow out a road
Under an ash-tree in its neighbourhood.
But whether this a special virtue is,
Or like some virtues but a special vice,
We need not argue. This at least is true,
That in the Mole are trout, and many too,
As I have often proved with rod and line
From boyhood up, blest days of pins and twine !
How many an afternoon have our hushed feet
Crept through the alders where the waters meet,
Mary's and mine, and our eyes viewed the pools
Where the trout lay, poor unsuspecting fools,
And our hands framed their doom,—while overhead
His orchestra of birds the blackbird led.
In those lost days, no angler of them all
Could boast our cunning with the bait let fall,
Close to their snouts, from some deceiving coigne,
Or mark more notches when we stopped to join
Our fishes head to tail and lay them out
Upon the grass, and count our yards of trout.
'Twas best in June, with the brook growing clear

WORTH FOREST

After a shower as now. In dark weather
It was less certain angling, for the stream
Was truly "sullen" then, so deep and dim.
'Tis thus in mountain lakes, as some relate,
Where the fish need the sun to see the bait.
The fly takes nothing in these tangled brooks,
But grief to fishermen and loss of hooks ;
And all our angling was of godless sort,
With living worm,—and yet we loved the sport.

But wait. This path will lead us to the gill,
Where you shall see the Mole in her first rill,
E'er yet she leaves the Forest, and her bed
Is still of ironstone, which stains her red,
Yet keeps her pure and lends a pleasant taste
To her young waters as they bubble past.
You hear her lapping round the barren flanks
Of these old heaps we call the "Cinder-banks,"
Where our forefathers forged their iron ore,
When Paul's was building. Now, the rabbits bore
In the still nights, beneath these ancient heaps,
A very honeycomb. See, where she peeps,
The infant river. You could hardly wet
Your ankles in her midmost eddy yet.
She has a pretty cunning in her look
Mixed with alarm, as in her secret nook
We find her out, half fugitive, half brave,
A look that all the Forest creatures have.
Let us away. Perhaps her guilelessness
Is troubled at a guilty human face,
(Mine, Prudence,—not your own).

I know a dell
Knee deep in fern, hard by, the very cell
For an elf hermit. Here stag-mosses grow,

WORTH FOREST

Thick as a coverlet, and foxgloves blow
Purple and white, and the wild columbine,
And here in May there springs that thing divine,
The lily of the valley, only here
Found in the Forest, blossoming year on year ;
A place o'ershadowed by a low-crowned oak.
The enchanted princess never had been woke
If she had gone to sleep in such a spot,
In spite of fortune. Why, a corpse forgot
Might lie, with eyes appealing to the sky,
Unburied here for half a century.
And this the woodcocks, as I take it, knew,
Who stayed to breed here all the summer through,
When other birds were gone. I flushed a pair
On the longest day last year—the nest was there—
And found some egg-shells chipped among the moss ;
The sight is rarer now than once it was.

There: we have gathered breath and climbed the hill,
And now can view the landscape more at will.
This is the Pilgrim road, a well-known track,
When folk did all their travelling on horseback,
Now long deserted, yet a right of way,
And marked on all our maps with due display.
Beneath this yew-tree, which perhaps has seen
Our fathers riding to St. Thomas' shrine,
(For this was once the way of pilgrimage
From the south-west for all who would engage
Their vows at Canterbury), we will sit,
As doubtless they too sat, and rest a bit.
I love this solitude of birch and fern,
These quags and mosses, and I love the stern
Black yew-trees and the hoary pastures bare,
Or tufted with long growths of withered hair
And rank marsh grass. I love the bell-heath's bloom,

WORTH FOREST

4

And the wild wealth which passionate earth's womb
Throws in the Forest's lap to clothe unseen
Its ancient barrenness with youth and green.
I love the Forest ; 'tis but this one strip
Along the watershed that still dares keep
Its title to such name. Yet once wide grown
A mighty woodland stretched from Down to Down,
The last stronghold and desperate standing-place
Of that indigenous Britannic race
Which fell before the English. It was called
By Rome "Anderida," in Saxon "Weald."
Time and decay, and man's relentless mood,
Have long made havoc of the lower wood
With axe and plough ;—and now, of all the plain,
These breadths of higher ground alone remain,
In token of its presence. Who shall tell
How long, in these lost wilds of brake and fell,
Or in the tangled groves of oak below,
Gathering his sacred leaf, the mistletoe,
Some Druid priest, forgotten and in need,
May here have kept his rite and owned his creed
After the rest? For hardly yet less rude,
Here later dwelt that patron of our wood,
The Christian Hermit Leonard, he who slew
The last authentic dragon England knew ;
A man of prayer and penitential vows,
Whose tale survives in many a Forest house.
For, having slain his monster, he was given
To choose whate'er he would in gift from heaven,
And took for his sole recompense this thing :
"Snakes should not bite, nor nightingales should sing
Within the Forest precincts." Thus, thought he,
His orisons should unmolested be
By mundane joys and troubles.

WORTH FOREST

Yonder ridge

Cutting the sky-line at the horizon's edge,
Is the Surrey Hills. Beneath the chalk-pit, set
Like a white cloud upon the face of it,
Lies Dorking, famed for fowls,—and, farther still,
Wotton and Shere ; in front you have Leith Hill,
Which looks upon St. Paul's and on the sea,
A point of note in our geography.
All this is Evelyn's land, who long ago
Left us his record of the vale below
And wrote the "Silva,"—now to hands as good
Passed, the descendants of his name and blood,
That doughty squire's, who lately stood in fight
With the new dragons of the Primrose rite,
And broke a lance for Ireland and the cause
Of freedom, flouted by coercion laws.
Strange change ! For long in history these same hills
Were held as ominous of lowland ills,
A source of robber fear, in foul repute,
And natural fortress since the days of Knute,
And earlier still when Saxon Sussex stood
A home-ruled kingdom of primæval wood.
A camp, an eagle's nest, a foot set down
Into the Weald, and evil of renown
With the free dwellers of the plain, who saw
A menace brooding of imperial law.
Saxon or Dane or Norman, each in turn,
Set there his camp to pillage and to burn ;
For history, just as now, was mainly then
A tale of wars 'twixt regiments and men.
We, forest dwellers, show with honest boast
Our Slaughter Bridge, where the Norse horde was lost,
Drowned in the red Mole waters, when the Dane
Fled from his eerie, nor returned again.

WORTH FOREST

The farthest point of all, and looking west,
Is the line of Hindhead, on whose triple crest,
With a good glass, a three-inch telescope,
You might make out the cross upon the top :
It used to be a gibbet. As a child
What tales I treasured of that headland wild,
With its three murderers, who in chains there hung,
Rocked by the winds and tempest-tossed and swung !
Three Portsmouth sailors were they who their mate
Murdered for gold, and grog which guineas get,
And in the " Punch Bowl " made their brute carouse,
Leaving him dead, in a lone public-house,
Where retribution seized them as was due,—
For in that age of simple faiths and true,
Murder did always out,—and so apace
Brought them to justice in that self-same place ;
And many years they hung. At last its sway
Humanity, that child of yesterday,
Asserted in their case, and craved their bones
For Christian sepulture and these trim stones.
I half regret the leniency thus lent :
Their gallows-tree was their best monument ;
But ours is a trim age.

There, farther down,
Is a tower, or " folly," built of late by one
We call in these parts " Chevalier de Malt,"
(The brewers love high places, and no fault).
Behind us the chief ridge—and, as I speak,
Out of its bowels, with an angry shriek,
And rushing down the valley at our feet,
The train has found us out in our retreat.
It came from Balcombe tunnel and is bound
To be in London e'er an hour is round.
It scarcely scares our solitude away ;

WORTH FOREST

And yonder Royston crows, the black and grey,
Sit on unmoved upon their oak. This ridge
Is only thirty miles from London Bridge,
And, when the wind blows north, the London smoke
Comes down upon us, and the grey crows croak,
For the great city seems to reach about
With its dark arms, and grip them by the throat.
Time yet may prove them right. The wilderness
May be disforested, and Nature's face
Stamped out of beauty by the heel of Man,
Who has no room for beauty in his plan.

Such things may be, for things as strange have been.
This very place, where peace and sylvan green
And immemorial silence and the mood
Of solemn Nature, virgin and unwooded,
Seem as a heritage,—this very place
Was once the workshop of a busy race
Which dug and toiled and sweated. Here once stood,
Amid the blackened limbs of tortured wood,
And belching smoke and fury from its mouth,
A monstrous furnace, to whose jaws uncouth
A race as monstrous offered night and day
The Forest's fairest offspring for a prey.
Here stood a hamlet, black and populous,
With human sins and sorrows in each house,
A mining centre. Which of us could guess
Each yew-tree yonder marks a dwelling-place
Of living men and women?—nay, a tomb?
Of all the secrets hidden in Earth's womb,
None surely is more pitiful and strange
Than this of human death and human change
Amid the eternal greenness of the Spring.
All we may guess of what the years shall bring,
Is this: that about April every year,

WORTH FOREST

White blossoms shall burst forth upon the pear
And pink upon the apple. Nothing else.
Earth has a silent mockery which repels
Our questioning. Her history is not ours,
And overlays it with a growth of flowers.

Ah, Prudence, you who wonder, being town bred,
What troubles grieve us in the lives we lead,
What cause we have for sorrow in these fields
Whose beauty girds us with its thousand shields,—
This is our tragedy. You cannot know,
In your bald cities, where no cowslips blow,
How dear life is to us. The tramp of feet
Brushes all older footsteps from the street,
And you see nothing of the graves you tread.
With us they are still present, the poor dead,
And plead with us each day of life, and cry
“Did I not love my life, I too, even I?”
You wonder!—Wonder rather we are not
All touched with madness and disease of thought,
Being so near the places where they sleep
Who sowed these fields we in their absence reap.
It were more logical. And here in truth
No few of our Weald peasants in their youth
Lose their weak wits, or in their age go mad,
Brooding on sights the world had deemed most glad.
I have seen many such. The Hammer Ponds,
So frequent in the Forest’s outer bounds,
Have all their histories of despairing souls
Brought to their depths to find their true life’s goals.
You see one in the hollow, where the light
Touches its blackness with a gleam of white,
Deep down, and over-browed with sombre trees
Shutting its surface primly from the breeze,
The landscapes’ innocent eye, set open wide

WORTH FOREST

To watch the heavens,—yet with homicide
Steeped to the lids. 'Tis scare a year ago
The latest sufferer from our rural woe
Found there his exit from a life too weak
To shield him from despairs he dared not speak.
A curious lad. I knew young Marden well,
Brought up a farmer's son, at the plough's tail,
And used for all romance to mind the crows
At plain day-wages in his father's house.
A "natural" he, and weak in intellect,
His fellows said, nor lightly to be pricked
To industry at any useful trade.
His wits would go wool-gathering in the shade
At harvest time, when all had work on hand,
Nor, when you spoke, would seem to understand.
At times his choice would be for days together
To leave his work and idle in the heather,
Making his bed where shelter could be found
Under the fern-stacks or on open ground,
Or oftenest in the charcoal-burners' hives,
When he could win that pity from their wives.
Poor soul! He needed pity for his face,
Scarred by a burn, and reft of human grace,
And for his speech which faltering in his head
Made a weak babble of the words he said.
His eyes too—what a monster's! Did you ever
Watch a toad's face at evening by a river
And note the concentrated light which lies
In the twin topazes men call his eyes?
Like these were Marden's. From the square of clay
Which was his face, these windows of his day
Looked out in splendour, but with a fixed stare
Which made men start who missed the meaning there.
Yet he had thoughts. Not seldom he and I
Made in these woods discourse of forestry,

WORTH FOREST

Walking together, I with dog and gun,
He as a beater, or, if game was none,
Marking the timber trees and underwoods. •
He knew each teller in these solitudes,
And loved them with a quite unreasoned art,
Learned from no teacher but his own wild heart.
Of trees he quaintly talked in measured saws
Which seemed the decalogue of Nature's laws,
Its burden being as erst, "Thou shalt not kill"
Things made by God, which shall outlive thee still.
For larch and fir, new comers from the North,
He pleaded scantily when their doom went forth,
Knowing they needs must die, and the birch stems,
Since Spring renews them, yet with stratagems
Framed to delay the moment of their fate.
For beech he battled with more keen debate
Of hand and eye, in deprecating tone,
Holding their rights coeval with our own.
But when we came to oak, good Sussex oak,
The flame burst forth, and all his being spoke
In words that jostled in his throat with tears,
"An oak which might outlive a thousand years."
He held this sacrilege. Perhaps some strains
Of Druid blood were mingled in his veins,
Which gave authority to guard the tree
Sacred of yore, and thus he vanquished me.

How came he to his end, poor Marden? Well,
All stories have their reason, as some tell,
In Eves that give the fruit for which men grieve,
Or, what is often worse, refuse to give.
This last was Marden's unprotected case,
Whose virtue failed him, and his ugliness,
To escape the common fate of all mankind.
He fell in love egregious and purblind,

WORTH FOREST

Just like the wisest. She who caused his flame
Was not, I think, in honesty to blame
If she was less than serious at his suit.
Marden, as lover, was grotesquely mute,
And his strange eyes were not the orbs to move
A maiden's fancy to a dream of love.
In truth they were scarce human. Still 'twas hard
His passion should be met, for sole reward,
With sermon phrases and such gospel talk
As preachers license for a Sunday walk,
Mixed with her laughter. This was all she gave,
An endless course of things beyond the grave,
Till he lost reckoning and, poor witless man,
Began to reason on the cosmic plan,
Which meted this scant mercy in his case,
And placed him in such straits for happiness.
Can you not see it? All our rustics live
In their small round of thoughts as in a hive,
Each cell they build resembling each each day
Till their wits swarm, and then they are away.
Marden went mad, misled by his queen bee,
Through a deep slough of black theology,
Which ended in destruction and this pool,
With hell beyond him for his poor dumb soul.
He sought her final pity for love lost.
She talked of heaven, and sent him tracts by post.
He pleaded. She reproved. She prayed. He swore,
She bade him go. He went, and came no more.
Such was the history, no whit uncommon.
I neither blame the boy nor blame the woman,
Only the hardness of a fate which laid
Its iron flail upon too weak a head.
She watched him go, half doubting what would come,
Her last tract crushed betwixt his angry thumb
And his clenched fingers, and his lips grown white,

WORTH FOREST

And his eyes gleaming with their maniac light,
And so towards the hill.

That afternoon,
The last of a late autumn, saw the sun
Set in unusual splendour (it is said
A disc of gold in a whole heaven of red),
The herald of a frost, the earliest
Known for a lifetime. There, for summer dressed,
The trees stood stiff and frozen in their green,
Belated revellers in some changing scene
Of sudden winter, and June left behind.
In all the forest was no breath of wind
For a full fortnight, nor was a leaf shed
Long after Nature in her shroud lay dead,
A beautiful black frost which held the land
In unseen fetters, but with iron hand.
The pools were frozen over in the night,
Without a flaw or ripple; and their light
Reflected every stem of every tree
In perfect mirrors of transparency.
Boys, who a week before were in the field
With bat and ball, now ventured, iron-heeled,
On the ice, skating, yet awhile in fear,
Seeing no footing on the water there.
And thus it fell about the corpse was found—
You will have guessed it—in the ice fast bound.
Two boys, the brothers of the girl he wooed,
Tired of their pastime stopped awhile and stood
Over a shallow place where rushes grow,
And peering down saw a man's face below
Watching their own;—his eyes were open laid,
Fixed in that terrible stare poor Marden's had—
And thought they saw a vision. Running back,
Loud in their fear, with spectres on their track,

WORTH FOREST

They spread the news through all the frightened farms,
Filling the cottagers with wild alarms,
Till some made bold with spades, and hewed away
The ice above to where the dead man lay.
There, sure enough, was Marden, his fool's mouth
Stuffed for all solace of his sad soul's drouth
With the girl's tracts. Thus primed, he had plunged in
And ended all, with a last deed of sin,
Grotesque and tragic as his life. No less
Let us persuaded be he rests in peace,
Or where were heaven's justice ?

One last tale,

As we walk back,—of worthy Master Gale,
Our house's founder, who in a dark age
Won us the lands we hold in heritage,
Working his forge here in the civil wars,
And welding fortunes out of iron bars.
A story with a moral too, at least,
For money makers, of how wealth increased,
And most of all for us, to whom his toil
Has proved a mine of ease and endless spoil,
Though of a truth we are unlineal heirs,
Not true descendants of his toils and cares.
His history stands recorded in a book
Himself achieved, e'er Death his anvil broke,
A volume full of wisdom and God's praise,
Trust in himself, and scorn of human ways.
He was a blacksmith, born at Sevenoke
In Kent, the toilsome son of toilsome folk,
And honourable too, as honour then
Was understood among commercial men.
He paid his way through life. He owed to none
Beyond their will to let the debt run on,
Nor trusted any farther than he need.

WORTH FOREST

He held the race of man a bastard breed,
An evil generation, bred of dust,
And prone to spending, idleness and lust.
God was his friend. Of Him he counsel took,
How he should make new ventures with new luck,
Praying each night continuance of health,
Increase of wisdom and increase of wealth ;
Nor ever in his yearly balance-sheet
Forgot to inscribe himself in heaven's debt.
A virtuous man, and holding with good cause
The eternal justice of the social laws
Which give to industry its well-earned meed,
And leave the weak and idle to their need.
From childhood up, he clutched the staff of life,
As if it were a cudgel for the strife,
And wielded it throughout relentlessly.
His parents, brothers, all by God's decree,
Died of the plague when he was scarce sixteen.
The date, as I have reckoned, should have been
The very year the patriots raised their backs
To the new pressure of the shipping tax.
His first fight was a battle for the pence
Left by his father, when, at dire expense
Of lawyer's fees and charges without end,
He found himself with fifty pounds to spend,
And a small stock-in-trade of iron sows,
A fireless smithy and an empty house.
With these and God's compassion, and a man
To strike and blow for him, his trade began,
Till in four years his industry had grown
To a fair substance in his native town.

When he was twenty-one, an accident
Brought him to Sussex ; and, as Saul was sent
To find his father's asses and therewith

WORTH FOREST

Met with a kingdom, so this honest smith,
While chasing a bad debtor through the Weald,
Lit of his fortune in this very field.
For, failing of his money, in its stead,
He took his debtor's forge and smelting shed ;
Sold his goodwill at Sevenoke, and set
His smithy in the Forest next to it.
This brought him trade. The civil wars began
And each man's hand was set against each man,
And sword to sword. But, while his neighbours fought,
Gale like a Gallio cared for these things nought,
And sold his iron with indifferent zeal
To kings and Parliaments in need of steel ;
Or, if a prejudice his thought divides,
It is for Cromwell and his Ironsides.
But God's be all the glory, His alone
Who to His servant Gale such grace had shown !

Thus in an iron age this thrifty man
Got gold and silver, and, while others ran
Out of their fortunes, he with pockets full
Bought up their lands and held the world a fool.
'Tis now two hundred years since Father Gale
Laid down his pick and hammer. He had won
By forty years of toil beneath the sun
The right to work no longer, for himself
And for his heirs for ever. This is Wealth !
He was a prudent buyer, and died possessed
Of some four thousand acres of the best
Land in the parish. His first purchases
Were in Worth Forest, to his vulgar eyes
I fear mere wood for burning. Pease pottage
And Frog's hole farms came next ; and in his age,
Wishing, as he says, to have a good estate
And house to live in, though the day was late

WORTH FOREST

To think of building, and he most abhorred
To waste his substance upon brick and board,
Holding with prudent minds that such intent
Is but at best a "sweet impoverishment"
And that the wise man doth more soundly hit
Who turns another's folly to his wit,
He purchased Caxtons, manor and domain,
To be the home of a new race of men.

His last words, as recorded by his son,
A man of taste and letters, and who won
A seat in Parliament in William's reign,
Were uttered in the ancient Biblic strain
Dear to the age he lived in and to him.
They might be David's in their cadence grim.
"When I am dead and gone," he said, "my son,
Trust in the Lord and in none other, none.
Be wary of thy neighbours. They are vile,
A brood of vipers, to oppose whose guile
I have been at constant charges all my life,
Take thee an honest woman for thy wife,
And get thee sons who shall inherit all
Thy God hath given thee, spite of Adam's fall.
Guard well thy rights, and cease not to pull down
All gates that block thy highway to the town,
Such as that man of Belial, Jacob Sears,
Has set in Crawley Lane these thirty years.
Let no man venture to enclose the wastes.
Be on thy guard against such ribald priests
As Lee and Troughton. They are an ill brood,
A bastard generation, bone and blood.
Hold fast to thy religion. Go not thou
After lewd women and the worldly show
Of rich apparel. Keep thy substance close
In thy own chamber for the fear of loss,

WORTH FOREST

And thy own counsel closer, lest men find
Their way to rob thee of thy peace of mind.
But, more than all, be quit of vain pretence,
And see thy income equal thy expense,
So shalt thou have thy God with thee alway."

Thus runs the story. You have seen to-day
The latest shoot of his posterity,
The boy we left there sleeping. His shall be
One day the guardianship of this domain,
As other Gales have held it. It were vain
In me to speak of all the goodly fruit
Begotten on the stem of this old root,
This sour crab-apple, worthy Master Gale.
This child perhaps But that will be a tale
For new historians.

Listen! Did you hear
Just now, down in the valley, some one cheer
Or hail us? Stop. Ay, there there comes a man,
Running and shouting loud as a man can.
He sees us too, and slowly through the fern
Now climbs to meet us. Something we shall learn
Without a doubt. God grant it be not ill!
And yet he seems to falter and stand still.
What is your message, Penfold? Why this haste?
A little closer. Speak, man! Here at last
You have found us. Come. What is it that you said?
See, we have courage.

"Sir, the child is dead!"

GRISELDA

A SOCIETY NOVEL IN RHYMED VERSE

CHAPTER I

AN idle story with an idle moral !
Why do I tell it, at the risk of quarrel
With nobler themes ? The world, alas ! is so,
And who would gather truth must bend him low,
Nor fear to soil his knees with graveyard ground,
If haply there some flower of truth be found.
For human nature is an earthy fruit,
Mired at the stem and fleshy at the root,
And thrives with folly's mixen best o'erlaid,
Nor less divinely so, when all is said.
Brave lives are lived, and worthy deeds are done
Each virtuous day, 'neath the all-pitying sun ;
But these are not the most, perhaps not even
The surest road to our soul's modern heaven.
The best of us are creatures of God's chance
(Call it His grace), which works deliverance ;
The rest mere pendulums 'twixt good and ill,
Like soldiers marking time while standing still.

GRISELDA

'Tis all their strategy, who have lost faith
In things Divine beyond man's life and death,
Pleasure and pain. Of heaven what know we,
Save as unfit for angels' company,
Say rather hell's? We cling to sins confessed,
And say our prayers still hoping for the best.
We fear old age and ugliness and pain,
And love our lives, nor look to live again.

I do but parable the crowd I know,
The human cattle grazing as they go,
Unheedful of the heavens. Here and there
Some prouder, may be, or less hungry steer
Lifting his face an instant to the sky,
And left behind as the bent herd goes by,
Or stung to a short madness, tossing wild
His horns aloft, and charging the gay field,
Till the fence stops him, and he, vanquished too,
Turns to his browsing—lost his Waterloo.

The moral of my tale I leave to others
More bold, who point the finger at their brothers,
And surer know than I which way is best
To virtue's goal, where all of us find rest.
Whether in stern denial of things sweet,
Or yielding timely, lest life lose its feet
And fall the further.

A plain tale is mine
Of naked fact, unconscious of design,
Told of the world in this last century
Of man's (not God's) disgrace, the XIXth. We
Have made it all a little as it is
In our own images and likenesses,
And need the more forgiveness for our sin.

GRISELDA

Therefore, my Muse, impatient to begin,
I bid thee fearless forward on thy road :
Steer thou thy honest course 'twixt bad and good.
Know this, in art that thing alone is evil
Which shuns the one plain word that shames the devil:
Tell truth without preamble or excuse,
And all shall be forgiven thee—all, my Muse !

In London, then, not many years ago
There lived a lady of high fashion, who
For her friends' sake, if any still there be
Who hold her virtues green in memory,
Shall not be further named in this true tale
Than as Griselda or the Lady L.,
Such, if I err not, was the second name
Her parents gave when to the font she came,
And such the initial letter bravely set
On her coach door, beneath the coronet,
Which bore her and her fortunes—bore, alas !
For, as in this sad world all things must pass
However great and nobly framed and fair :
Griselda, too, is of the things that were.

But while she lived Griselda had no need
Of the world's pity. She was proudly bred
And proudly nurtured. Plenty her full horn
Had fairly emptied out when she was born,
And dowered her with all bounties. She was far
As only children of the noblest are,
And brave and strong and opulent of health,
Which made her take full pleasure of her wealth.
She had a pitying scorn of little souls
And little bodies, levying heavy tolls
On all the world which was less strong than she.
She used her natural strength most naturally,

GRISELDA

And yet with due discretion, so that all
Stood equally in bondage to her thrall.
She was of that high godlike shape and size
Which has authority in all men's eyes :
Her hair was brown, her colour white and red,
Nor idly moved to blush. She held her head
Straight with her back. Her body, from the knee
Tall and clean-shaped, like some well-nurtured tree,
Rose finely finished to the finger tips ;
She had a noble carriage of the hips,
And that proportionate waist which only art
Dares to divine, harmonious part with part,
But of this more anon, or rather never.
All that the world could vaunt for its endeavour
Was the fair promise of her ankles set
Upon a pair of small high-insteped feet,
In whose behalf, though modestly, God wot,
As any nun, she raised her petticoat
One little inch more high than reason meet
Was for one crossing a well-besomed street.
This was the only tribute she allowed
To human folly and the envious crowd ;
Nor for my part would I be found her judge
For her one weakness, nor appear to grudge
What in myself, as surely in the rest,
Bred strange sweet fancies such as feet suggest.
We owe her all too much. This point apart,
Griselda, modesty's own counterpart,
Moved in the sphere of folly like a star,
Aloof and bright and most particular.

By girlish choice and whim of her first will
She had espoused the amiable Lord L.,
A worthy nobleman, in high repute
For wealth and virtue, and her kin to boot ;

GRISELDA

A silent man, well mannered and well dressed,
Courteous, deliberate, kind, sublimely blessed
With fortune's favours, but without pretence,
Whom manners almost made a man of sense.
In early life he had aspired to fame
In the world of letters by the stratagem
Of a new issue, from his private press,
Of classic bards in senatorial dress,
" *In usum Marchionis.*" He had spent
Much of his youth upon the Continent,
Purchasing marbles, bronzes, pictures, gems,
In every town from Tiber unto Thames,
And gaining store of curious knowledge too
On divers subjects that the world least knew ;
Knowledge uncatalogued, and overlaid
With dust and lumber somewhere in his head.
A slumberous man, in whom the lamp of life
Had never quite been lighted for the strife
And turmoil of the world, but flickered down
In an uncertain twilight of its own,
With an occasional flash, that only made
A deeper shadow for its world of shade.
When he returned to England, all admired
The taste of his collections, and inquired
To whose fair fortunate head the lot should fall
To wear these gems and jewels after all.
But years went by, and still unclaimed they shone,
A snare and stumbling-block to more than one,
Till in his fiftieth year 'twas vaguely said,
Lord L. already had too long delayed.
Be it as it may, he abdicated life
The day he took Griselda to his wife.

And then Griselda loved him. All agreed,
The world's chief sponsors for its social creed,

GRISELDA

That, whether poor Lord L. was or was not
The very fool some said and idiot,
Or whether under cloak of dulness crass,
He veiled that sense best suited to his case,
Sparing his wit, as housewives spare their light,
For curtain eloquence and dead of night ;
And spite of whispered tales obscurely spread,
Doubting the fortunes of her nuptial bed,
Here at this word all sides agreed to rest :
Griselda did her duty with the best.

Yet, poor Griselda ! When in lusty youth
A love-sick boy I stood unformed, uncouth,
And watched with sad and ever jealous eye
The vision of your beauty passing by,
Why was it that that brow inviolate,
That virginal courage yet unscared by fate,
That look the immortal queen and huntress wore
To frightened shepherds' eyes in days of yore
Consoled me thus, and soothed unconsciously,
And stilled my jealous fears I knew not why ?
How shall I tell the secret of your soul
Which then I blindly guessed, or how cajole
My boyhood's ancient folly to declare
Now in my wisdom the dear maid you were,
Though such the truth ?

Griselda's early days
Of married life were not that fitful maze
Of tears and laughter which betoken aught,
Changed or exchanged, of pain with pleasure bought,
Of maiden freedom conquered and subdued,
Of hopes new born and fears of womanhood.
Those who then saw Griselda saw a child
Well pleased and happy, thoughtlessly beguiled

GRISELDA

By every simplest pleasure of her age,
Gay as a bird just issued from its cage,
When every flower is sweet. No eye could trace
Doubt or disquiet written on her face,
Where none there was. And, if the truth be told,
Griselda grieved not that Lord L. was old.
She found it well that her sweet seventeen
Should live at peace with fifty, and was seen
Just as she felt, contented with her lot,
Pleased with what was and pleased with what was not.
She held her husband the more dear that he
Was kind within the bounds of courtesy,
And love was not as yet within her plan,
And life was fair, and wisdom led the van.

For she was wise—oh, wise! She rose at eight
And played her scales till breakfast, and then sat
The morning through with staid and serious looks,
Counting the columns of her household books,
Her daily labour, or with puzzled head
Bent over languages alive and dead,
Wise as, alas! in life those only are
Who have not yet beheld a twentieth year.
Wealth had its duties, time its proper use,
Youth and her marriage should be no excuse;
Her education must be made complete!
Lord L. looked on and quite approved of it.
The afternoons, in sense of duty done,
Went by more idly than the rest had gone.
If in the country, which Lord L. preferred,
She had her horse, her dogs, her favourite bird.
Her own rose-garden, which she loved to rake,
Her fish to feed with breadcrumbs in the lake,
Her schools, old women, poor and almshouses
Her sick to visit, or her church to dress.

GRISELDA

Lord L. was pleased to see her bountiful :
They hardly found the time to find it dull.

In London, where they spent their second year,
Came occupations suited to the sphere
In which they lived ; and to the just pretence
Of our Griselda's high-born consequence,
New duties to the world which no excuse
Admitted. She was mistress of L. House
And heir to its traditions. These must be
Observed by her in due solemnity.
Her natural taste, I think, repelled the noise,
The rush, and dust, and crush of London joys ;
But habit, which becomes a second sense,
Had reconciled her to its influence
Even in girlhood, and she long had known
That life in crowds may still be life alone,
While mere timidity and want of ease
She never ranked among youth's miseries.
She had her parents too, who made demand
Upon her thoughts and time, and close at hand
Sisters and friends. With these her days were spent
In simple joys and girlish merriment.
She would not own that being called a wife
Should make a difference in her daily life.

Then London lacks not of attractions fit
For serious minds, and treasures infinite
Of art and science for ingenious eyes,
And learning for such wits as would be wise,
Lectures in classes, galleries, schools of art :
In each Griselda played conspicuous part—
Pupil and patron, ay, and patron-saint
To no few poor who live by pens and paint.

GRISELDA

The world admired and flattered as a friend,
And only wondered what would be the end.

And so the days went by. Griselda's face,
Calm in its outline of romantic grace,
Became a type even to the vulgar mind
Of all that beauty means when most refined,
The visible symbol of a soul within,
Conceived immaculate of human sin,
And only clothed in our humanity
That we may learn to praise and better be.
Where'er she went, instinctively the crowd
Made way before her, and ungrudging bowed
To one so fair as to a queen of earth,
Ruling by right of conquest and of birth.

And thus I first beheld her, standing calm
In the swayed crowd upon her husband's arm,
One opera night, the centre of all eyes,
So proud she seemed, so fair, so sweet, so wise.
Some one behind me whispered "Lady L. !
His Lordship too ! and thereby hangs a tale."

His Lordship ! I beheld a placid man,
With gentle deep-set eyes, and rather wan,
And rather withered, yet on whose smooth face
Time seemed to have been in doubt what lines to trace
Of youth or age, and so had left it bare,
As it had left its colour to his hair.
An old young man perhaps, or really old,
Which of the two could never quite be told.
I judged him younger than his years gave right :
His looks betrayed him least by candlelight.
Yet, young or old, that night he seemed to me
Sublime, the priest of her divinity

GRISELDA

At whose new shrine I worshipped. But enough
Of me and my concerns! More pertinent stuff
My tale requires than this first boyish love,
Which never found the hour its fate to prove.
My Lady smiling motions with her hand;
The crowd falls back; his Lordship, gravely bland,
Leads down the steps to where his footmen stay
In state. Griselda's carriage stops the way!

And was Griselda happy? Happy?—Yes,
In her first year of marriage, and no less
Perhaps, too, in her second and her third.
For youth is proud, nor cares its last sad word
To ask of fate, and not unwilling clings
To what the present hour in triumph brings.
It was enough, as I have said, for her
That she was young and fortunate and fair.
The world that loved her was a lovely world,
The rest she knew not of. Fate had not hurled
A single spear as yet against her life.
She would not argue as 'twixt maid and wife,
Where both were woman, human nature, man,
Which held the nobler place in the world's plan
Her soul at least was single, and must be
Unmated still through its eternity.
And, even here in life, what reason yet
To doubt or question or despair of Fate?
Her youth, an ample web, before her shone
For hope to weave its subtlest fancies on,
If she had cared to dream. Her lot was good
Beyond the common lot of womanhood,
And she would prove her fortune best in this,
That she would not repine at happiness.
Thus to her soul she argued as the Spring
Brought back its joy to each begotten thing—

GRISELDA

Begotten and begetting. Who shall say
Which had the better reason, she or they ?

In the fourth year a half-acknowledged grief
Made its appearance in Griselda's life.
Her sisters married, younger both than she,
Mere children she had thought, and happily.
Each went her way engrossed by her new bliss,
Too gay to guess Griselda's dumb distress.
Her home was broken. In their pride they wrote
Things that like swords against her bosom smote,
The detail of their hopes, and loves, and fears.
Griselda read, and scarce restrained her tears.
Her mother too, the latest fledgling flown,
Had vanished from the world. She was alone.

When she returned to London, earlier
Than was her custom, in the following year,
She found her home a desert, dark and gaunt ;
L. House looked emptier, gloomier than its wont.
Griselda sighed, for on the table lay
Two letters, which announced each in its way
The expected tidings of her sisters' joy.
Either was brought to bed—and with a boy.
Her generous heart leaped forth to these in vain,
It could not cheat a first sharp touch of pain,
But yielded to its sorrow.

That same night,
Lord L., whose sleep was neither vexed nor light,
And who for many years had ceased to dream,
Beheld a vision. Slowly he became
Aware of a strange light which in his eyes
Shone to his vast discomfort and surprise ;

GRISELDA

And, while perplexed with vague mistrusts and fears,
He saw a face, Griselda's face, in tears
Before him. She was standing by his bed
Holding a candle. It was cold, she said,
And shivered. And he saw her wrap her shawl
About her shoulders closely like a pall.
Why was she there? Why weeping? Why this light
Burning so brightly in the dead of night?
These riddles poor Lord L.'s half-wakened brain
Tried dimly to resolve, but tried in vain.

"I cannot sleep to-night," went on the voice,
"The streets disturb me strangely with their noise,
The cabs, the striking clocks." Lord L.'s distress
Struggled with sleep. He thought he answered "Yes."
"What can I do to make me sleep? I am ill,
Unnerv'd to-night. This house is like a well.
Do I disturb you here, and shall I go?"
Lord L. was moved. He thought he answered "No."
"If you would speak, perhaps my tears would stop.
Speak! only Speak!"

Lord L. here felt a drop
Upon his hand. She had put down the light,
And sat upon his bed forlornly white
And pale and trembling. Her dark hair unbound
Lay on her knees. Her lips moved, but their sound
Came strangely to his ears and half-unheard.
He only could remember the last word:
"I am unhappy—listen L. !—alone."
She touched his shoulder and he gave a groan.
"This is too much. You do not hear me. See,
I cannot stop these tears. Too much!"
And he,
Now well awake, looked round him. He could catch
A gleam of light just vanished, and the latch

GRISELDA

Seemed hardly silent. This was all he knew.
He sat some moments doubting what to do,
Rose, went out, shivered, hearing nothing, crept
Back to his pillow, where the vision wept
Or seemed to weep awhile ago, and then
With some disquiet went to sleep again.

Next morning, thinking of his dream, Lord L.
Went down to breakfast in intent to tell
The story of his vision. But he met
With little sympathy. His wife was late,
And in a hurry for her school of art.
His lordship needed time to make a start
On any topic, and no time she gave.
Griselda had appointments she must save,
And could not stop to hear of rhyme or reason—
The dream must wait a more convenient season.
And so it was not told.

Alas, alas !

Who shall foretell what wars shall come to pass,
What woes be wrought, what fates accomplishèd,
What new dreams dreamt, what new tears vainly shed,
What doubts, what anguish, what remorse, what fears
Begotten in the womb of what new years !—
And all because of this, that poor Lord L.
Was slow of speech, or that he slept too well !

CHAPTER II

THUS then it was. Griselda's childhood ends
With this untoward night ; and what portends
May only now be guessed by those who read
Signs on the earth and wonders overhead.
I dare not prophesy.

What next appears
In the vain record of Griselda's years
Is hardly yet a token, for her life
Showed little outward sign of change or strife,
Though she was changed and though perhaps at war.
Her face still shone untroubled as a star
In the world's firmament, and still she moved,
A creature to be wondered at and loved.
Her zeal, her wit, her talents, her good sense
Were all unchanged, though each seemed more intense
And lit up with new passion and inspired
To active purpose, valiant and untired.
She faced the world, talked much and well, made friends,
Promoted divers schemes for divers ends,
Artistic, social, philanthropical :
She had a store of zeal for each and all.
She pensioned poets, nobly took in hand
An emigration plan to Newfoundland,
Which ended in disaster and a ball.
She visited St. George's hospital,

GRISELDA

The Home for Fallen Women, founded schools
Of music taught on transcendental rules.
L. House was dull though splendid. She had schemes
Of a vast London palace on the Thames,
Which should combine all orders new and old
Of architectural taste a house could hold,
And educate the masses. Then one day,
She fairly wearied and her soul gave way.

Again she sought Lord L., but not to ask
This time his counsel in the thankless task
She could no more make good, the task of living.
He was too mere a stranger to her grieving,
Her needs, her weakness. All her woman's heart
Was in rebellion at the idle part
He played in her sad life, and needed not
Mere pity for a pain to madness wrought.
She did not ask his sympathy. She said
Only that she was weary as the dead,
And needed change of air, and life, and scene :
She wished to go where all the world had been—
To Paris, Florence, Rome. She could not die
And not have seen the Alps and Italy.
Lord L. had tried all Europe, and knew best
Where she could flee her troubles and find rest.
Such was her will. Lord L., without more goad,
Prepared for travel—and they went abroad.

I will not follow here from day to day
Griselda's steps. Suffice it if I say
She found her wished-for Paris wearisome,
Another London and without her home,
And so went on, as still the fashion was,
Some years ago, ere Pulman cars with gas

GRISELDA

And quick night flittings had submerged mankind
In one mad dream of luggage left behind,
By the Rhone boat to Provence. This to her
Seemed a delicious land, strange, barren, fair,
An old-world wilderness of greys and browns,
Rocks, olive-gardens, grim dismantled towns,
Deep-streeted, desolate, yet dear to see,
Smelling of oil and of the Papacy.
Griselda first gave reins to her romance
In this forgotten corner of old France,
Feeding her soul on that ethereal food,
The manna of days spent in solitude.
Lord L. was silent. She, as far away
Saw other worlds which were not of to-day.
With cardinals, popes, Petrarch and the Muse.
She stopped to weep with Laura at Vaucluse,
Where waiting in the Mistral poor Lord L.,
Who did not weep, sat, slept and caught a chill ;
This sent them southwards on through Christendom,
To Genoa, Florence, and at last to Rome,
Where they remained the winter.

Change had wrought
A cure already in Griselda's thought,
Or half a cure. The world in truth is wide,
If we but pace it out from side to side,
And our worst miseries thus the smaller come.
Griselda was ashamed to grieve in Rome,
Among the buried griefs of centuries,
Her own sweet soul's too pitiful disease.
She found amid that dust of human hopes
An incantation for all horoscopes,
A better patience in that wreck of Time :
Her secret woes seemed chastened and sublime.
There in the amphitheatre of woe.

GRISELDA

She suffered with the martyrs. These would know,
Who offered their chaste lives and virgin blood,
How mortal frailty best might be subdued.
She saw the incense of her sorrow rise
With theirs as an accepted sacrifice
Before the face of the Eternal God
Of that Eternal City, and she trod
The very stones which seemed their griefs to sound
Beneath her steps, as consecrated ground.
In face of such a suffering hers must be
A drop, a tear in the unbounded sea
Which girds our lives. Rome was the home of grief,
Where all might bring their pain and find relief,
The temple of all sorrows : surely yet,
Sorrow's self here seemed swallowed up in it.

'Twas thus she comforted her soul. And then,
She had found a friend, a phoenix among men,
Which made it easier to compound with life,
Easier to be a woman and a wife.

This was Prince Belgirate. He of all
The noble band to whose high fortune fall
The name and title proudest upon earth
While pride shall live by privilege of birth,
The name of Roman, shone conspicuous
The head and front of his illustrious house,
Which had produced two pontiffs and a saint
Before the world had heard of Charles le Quint ;
A most accomplished nobleman in truth,
And wise beyond the manner of his youth,
With wit and art and learning, and that sense
Of policy which still is most intense
Among the fertile brains of Italy,
A craft inherited from days gone by.

GRISELDA

As scholar he was known the pupil apt
Of Mezzofanti, in whose learning lapped
And prized and tutored as a wondrous child,
He had sucked the milk of knowledge undefiled
While yet a boy, and brilliantly anon
Had pushed his reputation thus begun
Through half a score of tongues. In art his place
Was as chief patron of the rising race,
Which dreamed new conquests on the glorious womb
Of ancient beauty laid asleep in Rome.
The glories of the past he fain would see
Wrought to new life in this new century,
By that continuous instinct of her sons,
Which had survived Goths, Vandals, Lombards, Huns,
To burst upon a wondering world again
With full effulgence in the Julian reign.

In politics, though prudently withdrawn
From the public service, which he held in scorn,
As being unworthy the deliberate zeal
Of one with head to think or heart to feel ;
And being neither priest, nor soldier, nor
Versed in the practice of Canonic lore,
He made his counsels felt and privately
Lent his best influence to "the Powers that be,"—
Counsels the better valued that he stood
Alone among the youth of stirring blood,
And bowed not to that Baal his proud knee,
The national false goddess, Italy.
He was too stubborn in his Roman pride
To trick out this young strumpet as a bride,
And held in classic scorn who would become
Less than a Roman citizen in Rome.
A man of heart besides and that light wit
Which leavens all, even pedantry's conceit.

GRISELDA

None better knew than he the art to shew
A little less in talk than all he knew.
His manner too, and voice, and countenance,
Imposed on all, and these he knew to enhance
By certain freedoms and simplicities
Of language, which set all his world at ease.
A very peer and prince and paragon,
Griselda thought, Rome's latest, worthiest son,
An intellectual phoenix.

On her night

A sudden dawn had broke, portentous, bright.
Her soul had found its fellow: From the day
Of their first meeting on the Appian Way,
Beside Metella's tomb, where they had discussed
The doubtful merit of a new found bust,
And had agreed to differ or agree,
I know not which, a hidden sympathy
Had taken root between them. Either mind
Found in the other tokens of its kind
Which spoke in more than words, and naturally
Leaned to its fellow-mind as tree to tree.
Lord L., who had known the prince in other days,
While riding home had spoken in his praise,
And won Griselda's heart and patient smile,
For divers threadbare tales of blameless guile
Among the virtuosi, where the prince
Had played his part with skill and influence,
His sworn ally. Lord L. grew eloquent,
Finding her ears such rapt attention lent,
And could have gone on talking all his life
About his friend's perfections to his wife.

Griselda listened. In her heart there stirred
A strange unconscious pleasure at each word,

GRISELDA

Which made the sunshine brighter and the sky
More blue, more tender in its sympathy.
The hills of the Campagna crowned with snow
Moved her and touched, she knew not why nor how.
The solemn beauty of the world ; the fate
Of all things living, vast and inchoate
Yet clothed with flowers ; the soul's eternal dream
Of something still beyond ; the passionate whim
Of every noble mind for something good,
Which should assuage its hunger with new food ;
The thrill of hope, the pulse of happiness,
The vague half-conscious longing of the eyes—
All these appealed to her, and seemed to lie
In form and substance under the blue sky,
Filling the shadows of the Sabine Hills
As with a presence, till her natural ills,
Transfigured through a happy mist of tears,
Gave place to hopes yet hardly dreamed as hers.
And still Lord L. talked calmly on, and she
Listened as to the voice of prophecy,
Nursing the pressure which the Prince's hand
Had left in hers, nor cared to understand.

From this day forth, I say, a tender mood
Possessed them both scarce conscious and unwooed,
Even in the Prince, her elder and a man.
At least Griselda had no thought nor plan
Beyond the pleasure of a friendship dear
To all alike, Lord L., the Prince, and her :
No plan but that the day would be more sweet,
More full of meaning, if they chanced to meet ;
And this chanced every day. The Prince was kind
Beyond all kindness, and Lord L. could find
No words to speak his thanks he thus should be
The cicerone of their company.

GRISELDA

And where a better? Belgirate's lore
In all things Roman was in truth a store
From which to steal. At her Gamaliel's knees
Griselda sat and learned Rome's mysteries
With all the zeal of a disciple young
And strange to genius and a pleading tongue.
The Prince was eloquent. His theme was high,
One which had taught less vigorous wings to fly,
The world of other days, the Pagan Rome,
The scarce less Pagan Rome of Christendom.
On these the Prince spoke warmly much and well,
Holding Griselda's patient ears in spell,
Yet broke off smiling when he met her eye
Fixed on his face in its mute sympathy:
A smile which was a question, an appeal,
And seemed to ask the meaning of her zeal.
He did not understand her quite. He saw
Something beyond, unfix'd by any law
Of woman's nature his experience knew:
He knew not what to hold or hope as true.
For she was young and sad and beautiful,
A very woman with a woman's soul.
She had so strange a pathos in her eyes,
A tone so deep, such echoes in her voice.
What was this Roman Hecuba to her?
This prate of consul, pontiff, emperor?
These broken symbols of forgotten pride?
These ashes of old fame by fame denied?
What were these stones to her that she should
weep,
Or spend her passion on a cause less deep
Than her own joys and sorrows? Was it love,
Or what thing else had such a power to move?
If there was meaning in red lips! And yet
'Twere rank impiety to think of it.

GRISELDA

An Italian woman—yes. But she? Who knew
What English virtue dared yet dared not do?

This was the thought which lent its mockery
To the more tender omen of his eye,
And checked the pride and chilled the vague desire
Her beauty half had kindled into fire.
Yet hope was born and struggled to more life,
A puny infant with its fears at strife,
An unacknowledged hidden bastard child,
Too fair to crush, too wise to be beguiled;
Even Griselda's prudery confessed
A star of Bethlehem risen in her East.

And thus the winter passed in happiness
If not in love. I leave to each to guess
What name 'twere best to give it, for to some
Who judge such things by simple rule of thumb,
'Twill seem impossible they thus should meet
Day after day in palace, temple, street,
Beneath the sun of heaven or in the shade
Of those old gardens by the cypress made,
Or on their horses drinking in the wind
Of the Campagna, and with care behind,
Left to take vengeance upon poor Lord L.,
Some furlongs back a solemn sentinel,
Or in the twilight slowly stealing home
Towards the hundred cupolas of Rome,
To greet the new-born moon and so repeat
Old Tuscan ditties, tender, wise, and sweet,
To the light clatter of their horse-hoofs' chime
In echoing answer of their terza-rhyme—
'Twill seem, I say, to some impossible
That all this was not love. Yet, sooth to tell,

GRISELDA

Easter had come and gone, and yet 'twas true
No word of love had passed between the two.

The fact is, after the first halcyon hour
When she had met the Prince and proved his power
To move her inmost soul, Griselda made
This compact with her heart no less than head,
Being a woman of much logic sense,
And knowing all, at least by inference :
She was resolved that, come what evil might
On her poor heart, the right should still be right,
And not a hair's-breadth would she swerve from this,
Though it should cost her soul its happiness.
She would not trifle longer, nor provide
The Prince with pretext for his further pride.
Or grant more favour than a friendship given
Once and for all, in this world as in heaven.
This she indeed could offer, but, if more
Were asked, why then, alas ! her dream was o'er.
I think no actual covenant had passed
In words between them either first or last,
But that the Prince, though puzzled and perplexed,
Had drawn a just conclusion from his text,
And read her meaning, while the hazard made,
Of certain idle words at random said,
Had sapped his confidence, and served to show
If speech were wise, 'twas wiser to forego.

Once too he wrote a sonnet. They had spent
An afternoon (it was in early Lent)
At that fair angle of the city wall
Which is the English place of burial,
A poet's pilgrimage to Shelley's tomb,—
The holiest spot, Griselda thought, in Rome,—

GRISELDA

A place to worship in, perhaps to pray,
At least to meditate and spend the day.

She had brought her friend with her. She had at
heart

To win his homage for the unknown art
Of this dead alien priest of Italy,
This lover of the earth, and sea, and sky ;
And, reading there and talking in that mood
Which comes of happiness and youthful blood
So near akin to sorrow, their discourse
Had touched on human change and pain's remorse
Amid the eternal greenness of the spring ;
And, when they came to part, there had seemed to ring
A note of trouble in Griselda's voice,
A sigh as if in grief for human joys,
An echo of unspoken tenderness,
Which caused the Prince to hold her hand in his
One little moment longer than was right,
When they had shaken hands and bid good-night.

And so he wrote that evening on the spur
Of the first tender impulse of the hour
A sonnet to Griselda, a farewell
It seemed to be, yet also an appeal—
Perhaps a declaration ; who shall say
Whether the thought which lightened into day,
Between the sorrowing accents of each line,
Was more despair or hope which asked a sign ?

“Farewell,” it said, “although nor seas divide
Nor kingdoms separate, but a single street,
The sole sad gap between us, scarce too wide
For hands to cross, and though we needs must meet
Not in a year, a month, but just to-morrow,

GRISELDA

When the first happy instinct of our feet
Bears us together,—yet we part in sorrow,
Bidding good-bye, as though we would repeat
Good-byes for ever. There are gulfs that yawn
Between us wide with time and circumstance,
Deep as the gulf which lies 'twixt dead and dead.
The day of promise finds no second dawn :
See, while I speak, the pressure of our hands
Fades slowly from remembrance, and is fled.
And our weak hearts accept their fate. Nay, nay,
We meet again, but never as to-day."

To this Griselda answered nothing. She
Was pleased, yet disconcerted. Poetry
Is always pleasant to a woman's ear,
And to Griselda had been doubly dear,
If it had touched less nearly. But her heart
Had bounded with too violent a start
To leave her certain of her self-control,
In this new joy which seemed to probe her soul.
And feeling frightened she had tried to find
A reason for the tumult of her mind
In being angry. He should not have dared
To strike so near the truth. Or had she bared
Her soul so plain to his that he should speak
Of both as an eye-witness? She felt weak
And out of temper with herself and him,
And with the sudden waking from a dream
Too long indulged, and with her own sad fate,
Which made all dreams a crime against the State,
There yawned indeed a gulf between them. This
It needed no such word as had been his
To bring back to her memory or show
How wide it was, and deep, and far below ;
And yet she shuddered, for already thought

GRISELDA

Had led her to the brink where reason fought
With folly, and conjured it to look down
Into the vast and terrible unknown.
This was itself an omen.

All that day
Griselda had a headache, and said nay
To those who called, the Prince among the rest,
Who came distrusting and returned distressed.
Awhile this humour lasted. Then they met,
And Belgirate, venturing a regret
For having vexed her with so poor a rhyme,
Griselda had protested want of time
And want of talent as her sole excuse
For having made no answer to his Muse,
Yet cast withal a look so pitiful
Upon his face it moved his very soul.
This closed the incident. He might have spoken
Perhaps that instant, and received some token
Of more than a forgiveness. But his fate
Had willed it otherwise or willed too late.
For love forgives not, plead it as we may
To speak the unspoken "Yes" of yesterday.

CHAPTER III

Who has not seen the falls of Tivoli,
The rocks, the foam-white water, and the three
Fair ruined temples which adorn the hill?
Who has not sat and listened to the shrill
Sweet melody of blackbirds, and the roar
Of Anio's voice rebounding from the shore,
Nor would have given his very soul to greet
Some passing vision of a white nymph's feet,
And weaving arms, as the wild chasm's spray
Beat on his face, for ever answering "Nay"?
Who has not turned away with sadder face,
Abashed before the genius of the place,
A wiser man, and owned upon his knees,
The dull transmontane Goth and boor he is?
Who that was born to feel?

What sons of clay
Are these that stand among your shrines to-day,
Gods of the ancient rivers! and who set
The heavy impress of barbarian feet
Upon your classic shores, and dare to love
Your ruined homes in temple, rock, and grove!
What new rude sons of Japhet! What mad crew,
Whose only creed is what it dares to do
Through lack of knowledge, whose undoubting heart,
Here in the very temples of old art,

GRISELDA

Brings out its little tribute, builds its shrines,
Wreathes its sad garlands of untutored lines,
Writes, paints, professes, sculptures its new gods,
And dares to have its home in your abodes !

Oh, if I had a soul oppressed with song,
A tongue on fire to prophesy among
My brother prophets, if I had a hand
Which needs must write its legend on life's sand
With brush or chisel, I at least would choose
Some soil less fair, less sacred to the Muse,
Some younger, wilder land, where no sad voice
Had ever stammered forth its tale of joys,
And loves and sorrows, or in tones less rude
Than the brute pulsing of its human blood ;
If I would build a temple, it should be
At least not here, not here in Italy,
Where all these temples stand. My thought should
shape
Its fancies in rough granite on some cape
O'erlooking the Atlantic, from whose foam
No goddess ever leaped, and not in Rome,
Beneath the mockery of immortal eyes,
Gazing in marble down, so coldly wise !

Such was Griselda's thought, which, half aloud,
She uttered one May morning 'mid a crowd
Of pleasure-seekers, come from Rome to see
The wonder of these falls of Tivoli,
And Belgirate's villa, where the Prince
Was offering entertainment (for his sins),
And dancing to all such as called him friend
That Spring in Rome, now nearly at an end ;—
A thought suggested by the place and by
A German painter, who undauntedly

GRISELDA

Was plying a huge canvas just begun,
With brush and palette seated in the sun.
She had hardly meant to speak, and when Lord L.
Objected (for he knew his classics well)
That landscape-painting was an unknown trade
In the days of Horace, blushed for her tirade,
And turned to Belgirate, who stood near,
Playing the host to all the world and her.

The Prince appealed to, though his care was less
With what was spoken than the speaker's face,
Took up the parable, confessed the truth
Of all each ventured, and agreed with both.
Nature, he said, and art, though now allied,
Had not in all times thus walked side by side
Indeed the love of Nature, now so real,
Was alien to the love of the ideal,
The classic love which claimed as though of need
Some living presence for each fountain-head,
Each grove, each cavern, satyr, nymph, or god,
A human shape unseen yet understood.
This was the thought which lived in ancient art,
Eschewing the waste places of the heart,
And only on compulsion brought to face
Brute Nature's aspect in its nakedness.
Nature as Nature was a thought too rude
For these, untempered in its solitude.
It had no counterpart in our new love
Of mountain, sea, and forest. Then, each grove
Asked for its statue, each perennial spring
Its fountain. Solitude itself must bring
Its echo. Every mountain top of Greece
Beheld fair temples rise. A law of peace
Reigned over art in protest at the mood
Of social life which drenched the world in blood.

GRISELDA

All now had been reversed. Our modern creed
Scouted the law that men were born to bleed.
It turned from human nature, if untaught,
And wrought mankind, perhaps and overwrought
Into trim shapes, and then for its relief
Rushed to the wilderness to vent its grief
In lonely passion. Here it neither sought
Nor found a presence which it needed not.
It chose wild hills and barren seas. It saw
Beauty in tumult, in revolt a law.
Here it gave reins to its brute instincts. Here
It owned no god, no guide, no arbiter.
Its soul it must avenge of discipline,
And Nature had gone naked from the shrine.
This was its consolation.

Of the score
Who stood around him and who praised his lore,
Perhaps no single listener understood
The thought which underlay the Prince's mood,
Or guessed its bitterness—not even she
Who lent the moral to his mockery.
Yet she was moved. In her too was a need
Of consolation for too fair a creed,
An impulse of rebellion. In her blood
There lived a germ of Nature unsubdued,
Which would not be appeased. She too had sought
A refuge from the tyranny of thought
In the brute impulses of sea and plain
And cloud and forest far from haunts of men.
A vain mad search. The fetters of her pride
Galled her like sores. Griselda turned and sighed.

That evening on the terrace, vaguely lit
With paper lanterns and the infinite

GRISELDA

Display of those fair natural lamps, the stars,
And 'neath the influence of the planet Mars
Or Venus or another—which it was
We best may judge by that which came to pass—
The Prince essayed his fortune.

From the hour
Of their first flash of eloquence, some power,
Some most persistent and ingenious fate
Of idle tongues had held them separate,
Griselda and the Prince—him in his part
Of host, with cares not wholly of the heart
Demanding his attention, while on her
Friends fastened more than dull and less than dear.
In vain they stopped, and loitered, and went on,
Leaving no trick untried, unturned no stone ;
In vain they waited. Still their hope deferred
Failed of its object, one consoling word,
One little sigh as of relief thus given :
“ Well, they are gone at last, and thanked be Heaven.”
But hour on hour went by, and accident
Seemed still at pains to frustrate their intent,
Piling up grief for them and poor Lord L.,
On whom, in fault of foes, their vengeance fell.
'Twas worst for her. She knew not whom to strike,
Lord L., her friends, the Prince—'twas now alike.
She had lost in fact her temper, if I dare
Thus speak of one so wise and one so fair,
And to the point that now there was no room
For other thought, but L. should take her home,
Away and speedily.

The Prince, who knew
No word of what a storm Fate held in brew,
And who had sought, in innocence of all,
Griselda's hand to lead the opening ball;

GRISELDA

And sought in vain, now found, to his despair,
My lady cloaked and standing on the stair.
She was alone. "Lord L. had gone," she said,
"To bid the Prince good night. Her foolish head
Had played her false, and ached with the new heat
Of the May sun (even L. complained of it).
They must be home betimes. Next day was Sunday,
And they had much to do 'twixt that and Monday,
In view of their departure." "Whither? whence?
In Heaven's name," exclaimed the astounded Prince.
"Why, home to England, she had thought he knew:
She must have told him. L. was more than due
In London, where his place in Parliament
Required his presence. He had missed the Lent,
And dared not miss the Easter session. She
Thought he was right, altho',"—and suddenly
She burst in tears. The Prince, in dire distress,
Besought her to be calm. But she, with face
Hid in both hands, and turning from the light,
Broke from his arms, and rushed into the night:
Across the hall, beneath the portico,
And down the steps she fled, to where below
The garden lay all dim with starlit shade,
And the white glimmer of the main façade.
Here Belgirate found her on a seat,
Crouched in an angle of the parapet,
And sobbing as in terror. His surprise
Was changed to resolution. To his eyes
The world became transfigured. "Lady L.,"
He whispered, "what is this? You love me? Well,
Why do you weep?"

He took her hands in his
And pressed them to his lips; and at the kiss
Griselda started from the heap she was

GRISELDA

And sat upright, with pale pathetic face
Turned to the night. By the dim starlight he
Beheld, half-awed and half in ecstasy,
The strange emotion of her countenance.
She made no gesture to withdraw her hands,
No sign of disagreement with his words.
Her eyes looked scared and troubled like a bird's
Caught in a net, and seemed to ask of Fate
Where the next blow should fall. 'Twas thus she sat
Speechless, inanimate, nor seemed to breathe.
The Prince could hear the chattering of her teeth,
And feel her shiver in the warm night wind,—
And yet its touch was hardly thus unkind.

He too, poor soul, in hope and tenderness,
Still kissed her hands, and kissed her gloves and dress,
And kneeling at her feet embraced her knees
With soothing arms and soft cajoleries.
She dared not turn nor speak. The balustrade
Served as a pretext for her with its shade
Hiding his face. She would not seem to guess
All that his fondness asked of her distress :
A word might break the spell. She only knew
She was a poor sad woman, doomed to do
Sorrow to all who loved her, that the Prince
Had spoken truly, and her long pretence
Of innocence was o'er. She scorned to make
An idle protest now for honour's sake.
He had a right to ask for what he would
Now that she loved him, and her womanhood
Reserved one tearful right, and only one,
To hide her face an instant and be gone.

How long they sat thus silent who shall say?
Griselda knew not. Time was far away ;

GRISELDA

She wanted courage to prepare her heart
For that last bitterest word of all, "We part ;"
And he cared naught for time : his heaven was there,
Nor needed thought, nor speech, nor even prayer.

A sound of music roused them. From the house
Voices broke in and strains tumultuous,
Proving the dance begun. Then with a sigh
Griselda turned her head, and piteously
Looked in his face. She moved as if to go,
And when he held her still, "For pity, no,
Let me be gone," she cried. "I ask it thus,"
Clasping her hands. "You will not? No! alas!
You must not doubt me when I speak the truth ;
This is a great misfortune for us both."
"Griselda," he began. "Oh, stop," she said,
"You know not what you ask." She bent her head
Close to his own. "I am not what I seem,
A woman to be loved, not even by him
Whom I might choose to worship. Mine must be
An unfinished life, not quite a tragedy,
Even to my friends, an idle aimless life,
Not worth an argument, still less a strife.
You must forget, forgive me. We were friends,
Friends still perhaps ; but, oh ! this first day ends
Our love for ever. What you said was true,
Only I never guessed it."

The Prince knew
That she was weeping, and a single sob
Broke from her lips. She seemed her wounds to probe.
"Yes, I have loved you, loved you from the first,
The day we met at Terni, when you burst
Like sunshine on the storm of my dark life—
You, wise and free—I, only the sad wife

GRISELDA

Of one you called a friend. The fault was mine
And mine alone. In you there was no sin :
You stood too far from me, too high above
My woman's follies even to dream of love.
There, do not answer. You were kind to me,
Good, patient, wise—you could no other be—
But, oh ! you never loved me."

Here again

The Prince broke in protesting (but in vain):
Her words were madness and his heart was hers.
She would not listen nor control her tears—
"You never loved me. This one thought I hold
In consolation of my manifold
Deceits and errors. You at least are free
From all deceptions and remorse and me :—
I cannot cause you sorrow, else it were
Indeed too pitiful, too hard to bear."

She stooped and kissed his forehead reverently,
As one would kiss a relic ; and when he
Still would have spoken, stopped him with a hand
Laid on his lips, half-prayer and half-command.
She would not let him speak. The Prince, tho' mute,
Now pleaded with his hands and pressed his suit
With better eloquence, for this to her
Seemed less a crime than speech. Her ignorant fear
Had hardly fathomed yet the troubled sea
On which her lot was cast thus dangerously.
She only feared his words to prove him right ;
And these caresses in the dim still night
Soothed and consoled her. They were too unreal,
Too strange to her experience, quite to feel
Or quite to question. She, with half-shut eyes,
And face averted, ceased to feel surprise,

GRISELDA

And ceased to think. She was a child again,
Caressed and fondled. She forgot her pain,
And almost even his presence in the place.
He was too near, and could not see her face.
Besides, Griselda loved him. Only once
She made a silent protest with her hands,
As one might make asleep, and in her dream
Opened her eyes, and seemed to question him
With the pathetic instinct as of doom.
The Prince in rapture judged his hour was come.

Alas! poor Prince. If thou hadst had thy bliss,
I would not then have grudged thy happiness,
Thine nor Griselda's. Happiness is not
A merchandise men buy or leave unbought
And find again. It is a wild bird winging
Its way through heaven, in joyous circles ringing,
Aloft, at its own will. Then, e'er we wist,
It stooped and sat a moment on our wrist,
And fondled with our fingers, and made play
With jess and hood as if it meant to stay.
And we, if we were wise and fortunate,
And if the hour had been decreed of fate,
Seized the glad bird and held it in our hand,
And forced it to obey our least command,
Knowing that never more, if not made sure,
It would come again to voice, or sign, or lure.

Oh, such is happiness. That night for them
Fate stood, a genius, suppliant and tame,
Demanding to do service. Had they willed
The treasure-house of heaven had been unfilled
And emptied in their lap. They too, even they,
Mere mortals born, inheritors of clay,

GRISELDA

Had known eternal life, and been as gods,
Only the will between them was at odds,
Only the word was wanting.

What one thing

It was that frightened Fate to taking wing,
And scared for ever the celestial bird,
And left them desolate, if I have heard
I do not now remember, nor would say
Even if I knew. 'Twas told me not to-day
Nor yesterday, but in a time long since,
By one of the two who knew, in confidence,
And then not quite perhaps the utter truth—
Whoever tells it? But there came to both
A moment when, as Belgirate knew,
There was no further power to plead or sue :
They had played with Fate too long. Their hour was
over ;

She was no more his love nor he her lover.
His courage was exhausted. One by one
His fingers, which still held Griselda's gown,
Relaxed their hold. His hands dropped by his side,
His head upon his bosom, and the pride,
Which was the reason of his being, quailed.
Grief in that hour and tenderness prevailed,
And tears rushed to his eyes, long strangers there,
And to his lips, Italian-like, a prayer,
While he lay prostrate, his face turned from heaven,
Under the stars.

The tower clock struck eleven
And roused him. He had neither heard nor known
Griselda's going, but he was alone.

And she? Griselda? In a whirl of grief,
Tortured, distracted, hopeless of relief,

GRISELDA

And careless now what eye should see her tears,
Whom none could mock with bitterer jibes than hers,
And speechless to all question of her lord,
Who sought to learn what portent had occurred,
And still reverted to the theme begun
Of Roman fever and the Roman sun ;
She was driven back to Rome. Two days her door
Was shut to all the world, both rich and poor,
And on the third she went to Ostia,
Pleading a wild desire to see the sea.

The sea ! What virtue is there in the sea
That it consoles us thus in misery ?
In joy we do not love it, and our bliss
Scoffs at its tears and scorns its barrenness.
Our pride of life is in the fruitful Earth,
The mother of all joy, which gave us birth,
The Earth so touching in its hopes to be,
So green, so tender in its sympathy.
But when life turns to bitterness—ah ! then,
Where is Earth's message to the sons of men ?
How does she speak ? What sound of grief is hers
To match our grief ? What tale of pity stirs
Her jubilant heart ? The laughing woods give back
Naught of their happiness to those who lack.
The beauty of the uplands bars relief,
The prosperous fields are insolent to grief ;
There is no comfort in the lowing herds,
The hum of bees, the songs, the shouts of birds ;
There is no sob in all the living earth,
Naught but the flutter of discordant mirth,
On which, as on a pageant, morn and even
The careless sun shines mockingly from heaven.
There is no grief in all the world save one,
The ocean's voice, as tearful as our own.

GRISELDA

Then from the Earth we turn—too potent mother,
Too joyous in her offspring—to that other,
The childless, joyless, unproductive Sea,
And mourn with her her dread virginity.
We clasp her naked rocks with our two hands,
Barefoot we tread her barren waste of sands,
Her breadths of shingle and her treeless shore,
Knowing her griefs are as our griefs, and more,
An eternal lack of love.

’Twas in this guise
Griselda cradled her soul’s miseries,
And nursed it in its anguish like a child,
And soothed it to oblivion. The sea smiled
With its eternal smile upon her sorrow,
The self-same yesterday, to-day, to-morrow,
And kept its tears in its own bosom sealed,
A mystery of passion unrevealed,
Save in the tremor of its voice at noon,
When the wind rose and played wild chords thereon.
So she.

The memory of that place long stood
In her remembrance as a dream of good,
Dividing life as sleep divides the day,
A place of utter weakness. Let those say
Who will, that deeds of strength life’s milestones are.
The dearest days are not the days of war,
And victory is forgotten in the peace
Of certain hours gone by in helplessness,
When the soul ceased to battle, and lay still
As on a deathbed dumb to good and ill.
These are its treasures.

Nor was silence all
Griselda’s ointment. Hard by the sea-wall,

GRISELDA

Where daily her steps turned fresh peace to find,
A convent stood, inviting to the mind.
Here she found entrance at the chapel gate,
And knelt in prayer half-inarticulate,
Bowed to the earth. For patron saints it had
The Marys three—"two virtuous, and one bad,"
Griselda thought, "like her own self"—who came
In flight together from Jerusalem,
And landed there; and these in her great need,
She suppliant asked for her soul's daily bread,
Using all fondest words her lips could frame,
To speak her secret wishes without blame.
Six candlesticks she vowed, to each a pair,
So they would listen to and grant her prayer.
The superstition pleased her. In her pride
She bowed and begged like any peasant's bride,
For what? for whom? she hardly could explain
Even to her, the dear St. Magdalen.
"And yet," she argued, "she at least will know
And understand me if no other do."

All this was folly, but it comforted
And gave her strength. Then with a calmer head,
If not a calmer heart, she turned once more
From love to life. Her first strong grief was o'er.

CHAPTER IV

How shall I take up this vain parable
And ravel out its issue? Heaven and hell,
The principles of good and evil thought,
Embodied in our lives, have blindly fought
Too long for empire in my soul to leave
Much for its utterance, much that it can grieve.
A soldier on the battlefield of life,
I have grown callous to the signs of strife,
And feel the wounds of others and my own
With scarce a tremor and without a groan.
I have seen many perish in their sins,
Known much of frailty and inconsequence,
And if I laughed once, now I dare not be
Other than sad at man's insanity.
Therefore, in all humility of years,
Colder and wiser for hopes drowned in tears,
And seeking no more quarries for my mirth,
Who most need pity of the sons of earth,
I dip in kindlier ink my chastened pen,
And fill of my lost tale what leaves remain.

Years passed. Griselda from my wandering sight
Had waned and vanished, like a meteor bright,
Leaving no pathway in my manhood's heaven,
Save only memories vaguely unforgiven
Of something fair and sad, which for a day
Had lit its zenith and had gone its way.

GRISELDA

Rome and the Prince, the tale that I had heard,
Griselda's beauty—all that once had stirred
My curious thought to wonder and regret,
In the vexed problem of her woman's fate,
Had yielded place to the world's work-day cares,
The wealth it covets and the toil it dares.
I was no more a boy, when idle chance
And that light favour which attends romance
Brought me once more within the transient spell
Of other days, and dreams of Lady L.

'Twas in September (I have always found
That month in my life's record dangerous ground,
Whether it be due to some unreasoned stress
Of the mad stars which dog our happiness,
Or whether—since in truth most things are due
To natural causes, if our blindness knew—
To the strong law of Nature's first decay,
Warning betimes of time that cannot stay,
And summer perishing, and hours to come,
Lit by less hope in the year's martyrdom ;
And so we needs must seize at any cost
Fleet pleasure's hem lest all our day be lost)
'Twas in September, at a country house
In the Midland shires, where I had come, God knows,
Without a thought but of such joyous sort
As manhood ventures in the realms of sport
With that dear god of slaughter England's sons
Adore with incense-smoke and roar of guns,
That this new chapter opens. Who had guessed
So rare a phoenix housed in such a nest ?

For we, in truth, were no wise company,
Men strong and joyous, keen of hand and eye,

GRISELDA

And shrewd for pleasure, but whose subtlest wit
Was still to jest at life while using it,
And jest at love, as at a fruit low hung
To all men's lips, no matter whence it sprung.
A fool's philosophy, yet dear to youth
Bred without knowledge of the nobler truth,
And seeming wisdom, till the bitter taste
Of grief has come to cure its overhaste.
Naught was there, in the scene nor in the parts
Played by the actors, worthy serious hearts,
Or worthy her whose passion trod a stage
High o'er the frailties of our prurient age,
Griselda and her unattained fair dream
Of noble deeds and griefs unknown to them.
How came she there?

Our hostess was a woman
Less famed for wisdom than a heart all human,
Rich in life's gifts, a wealthy generous soul,
But still too fair and still too bountiful.
The rest, mad hoydens of the world, whose worth
Lay mired with folly, earthiest of the earth.
How came she there?

When I, unconscious all
Of such high presence at our festival,
Heard her name bandied in the general hum
Of hungry tongues, which told the guests had come,
And saw in converse with our host the form,
Familiar once in sunshine and in storm,
Of her who was to me the type and sign
Of all things noble, not to say Divine,
Breathing the atmosphere of that vain house,
My heart stopped beating. Half incredulous,
I looked and questioned in my neighbours' eyes,
Seeking the sense of this supreme surprise.

GRISELDA

My thought took words, as at the table set
Men's lips were loosed, discoursing while they ate,
And each to each.

Beside me, of the crew
Of gilded youths who swelled the retinue
Of our fair hostess in her daily lot,
Of hunting laughter when field sports were not,
Sat one, a joyous boy, whom fashion's freak,
A mad-cap courage and a beardless cheek,
Had set pre-eminent in pleasure's school
To play the hero and to play the fool
For those few years which are the summer's day
Of fashion's foils ere they are cast away.
Young Jerry Manton! Happy fortune's son,
What heights of vanity your creed had won,
Creed of adventure, and untiring words
And songs and loves as brainless as a bird's.
Who would not envy you your lack of sense,
Your lawless jibes, your wealth of insolence,
The glory of your triumphs unconcealed
In pleasure's inmost and most sacred field!
Who would not share the sunshine of your mirth,
Your god-like smile, your consciousness of worth,
The keenness of your wit in the world's ways,
Your heart so callous to its blame or praise!
Him I addressed, in pursuance of my doubt
How such a prodigy had come about.

Young Manton eyed me. "Every road," he said,
"Leads—well—to Rome." He laughed and shook
his head,
As if in censure of a thought less sage.
My lady's thirty is a dangerous age,

GRISELDA

And of the three where most misfortunes come
Is the worst strewn with wrecks in Christendom."
"You see," he added, "we are not all wise
In all dilemmas and all companies,
And there are times and seasons when the best
Has need of an hour's frolic with the rest,
If only to set free the importunate load
Of trouble pressing on an uphill road.
Woman's first snare is vanity. At twenty
Praises are pleasant, be they ne'er so plenty;
And some, the foolish ones, are thus soon caught
Seeking to justify the flattery taught.
These are the spendthrifts, dear ingenuous souls,
Whose names emblazoned stand on pleasure's rolls,
Manning the hosts of mirth. Apart from them,
More serious or less eager in their aim,
The wise ones wait like birds that hold aloof,
Conscious of danger and the cloven hoof.
Yet there are times."

He paused awhile and sighed.

"The second snare," said he, "is set less wide;
It stands midway between the dawn of youth
And beauty's sunset, with its naked truth,
A danger hidden cunningly in flowers,
And the wild drowsing of the noontide hours.
Here fall the elect, the chosen virtuous few,
Who have outlived the worst the storm could do,
But faint when it is over, through mere stress
Of their mortality's first weariness.
'Tis hard to see youth perish, even when
Ourselves to the mad warrant have set pen;
And for the wisest there are days of grief
And secret doubts and hours of unbelief
In all things but the one forbidden bliss

GRISELDA

Churchmen forbid, and poets call a kiss.
Why should we wonder? 'Tis a kindlier fate
At least than that, the last, which comes too late,
The old fool's folly nursed at forty-five.
Griselda is an angel, but alive,
Believe me, to her wings." A fatuous flush
Mantled his face, not quite perhaps a blush,
But something conscious, as of one who knows.
"Virtue and pleasure are not always foes,"
He sighed. "And much depends upon the man."

I turned impatient. There, behind her fan,
At the far table's end, Griselda's eyes
Were watching us, half hid by its disguise,
But conscious too, as if a secret string
Had vibrated 'twixt her and that vain thing,
The cynic boy, whose word was in my ear,
Dishonouring to me and him and her.
Our eyes met, and hers fell; a sudden pain
Touched me of memory, and in every vein
Ran jealous anger at young Manton's wit,
While, half aloud, I flung my curse on it.

Later, I found Griselda gravely gay,
And glad to see me in the accustomed way
Of half affection my long zeal had won,
Her face no older, though the years had spun
Some threads unnoticed in her fair brown hair
Of lighter hue than I remembered there,
Less silver streaked than gold. All else had grown
Fairer with time, and tenderer in its tone,
As when in August woods a second burst
Of leaves is seen more golden than the first.
A woman truly to be loved—but loving?
There was the riddle wit despaired of proving,

GRISELDA

For who can read the stars? I sat with her
The evening through, and rose up happier :
In all that crowd there was no single face
Worthy her notice, not to say her grace,
And once again her charm was on my soul.
"If she love any"—this was still the goal
Of my night thoughts in argument with fear—
"Say what they will, the lover is not here."
Not here ! And yet, at parting, she had pressed
Manton's sole hand, and nodded to the rest.

Four days I lived in my fool's paradise,
Importuning Griselda's changing eyes
With idle flattery. I found her mood
Softer than once in her young womanhood,
Yet restless and uncertain. There were hours
Of a wild gaiety, when all the powers
Of her keen mind were in revolt with folly,
Others bedimmed with wordless melancholy.
Once too or twice she shocked me with a phrase
Of doubtful sense, revealing thoughts and ways
New to her past, an echo of the noise
Of that mad world we lived in and its joys :
Such things were sacrilege. I could not see
Unmoved my angel smirched with vanity,
Even though, it seemed at moments, for my sake.
Her laughter, when she laughed, made my heart ache,
And I had spared some pain to see her sad
Rather than thus unseasonably glad.

Who would have dreamed it? Each new idle day,
When, tired with sport, we rested from the fray,
Five jovial shooters, jaded by the sun,
Seeking refreshment at the stroke of noon,—

GRISELDA

There, with the luncheon carts all trimly dight,
Stood Lady L., to the fool crowd's delight.
You would have thought her life had always been
Passed in the stubbles, as, with questions keen,
She eyed the bags and parleyed with the "guns;"
Rome's matron she with us the Goths and Huns.
Young Manton proudly spread for her his coat
Under a hedge, and she resented not.
Resented! Why resent? Nay, smiles were there.
And a swift look of pleasure, still more rare,
Pleasure and gratitude, as though the act
Had been of chivalry in form and fact
Transcending Raleigh's. Ay, indeed! Resent!
That eye were blind which doubted what it meant.

And still I doubted. Vanity dies hard.
And love, however starving of reward,
And youth's creed of belief. It seemed a thing
Monstrous, impossible, bewildering,
As tales of dwarfs and giants gravely told
By men of science, and transmuted gold,
And magic potions turning men to beasts,
And lewd witch Sabbaths danced by unfrocked priests.
Griselda! Manton! In what mood or tense
Could folly conjugate such dreams to sense,
Or draw the contract not in terms absurd
Of such a friendship or of act or word?
Where was the common thought between the two—
Even of partridges—the other knew?
Manton—Griselda! Nay 'twere fabulous,
A mere profanity, to argue thus;
Only I watched them closer when they strayed
To gather blackberries, as boy and maid
In a first courting, and her eager eyes
Turned as he spoke, and laughter came unwise



GRISELDA

Before she answered, and an hour was flown,
Before he joined the rest and she was gone.

O Love! what an absurdity thou art,
How heedless of proportion, whole or part!
Time, place, occasion, what are they to thee?
Thou playest the wanton with Solemnity,
The prince with Poverty, the rogue with Worth,
The fool with all the Wisdoms of the Earth.
Thou art a leveller, more renowned than Death,
For he, when in his rage he stops our breath,
Leaves us at least the harvest of our years,
The right to be heroic in our tears.
But thou dost only mock. Thou art a king
Dealing with slaves, who waits no questioning,
But gives—to this a province and a crown,
To that a beggar's staff and spangled gown;
And when some weep their undeserved disgrace,
Plucks at their cheeks and smites them in the face.
Thou hast no reverence, no respect for right.
Virtue to thee is a lewd appetite,
Remorse a pastime, modesty a lure,
And love, the malady, love's only cure.

Griselda, in her love at thirty-three,
Was the supreme fool of felicity.
Reason and she had taken separate roads,
A spectacle of mirth for men and gods.
And the world laughed—discreetly in its sleeves—
At her poor artless shifts and make-believes.
For it was true, true to the very text,
This whispered thing that had my soul perplexed,
Manton was her beloved—by what art,
What mute equation of the human heart,
What blind jibe of dame Fortune, who shall say?



GRISELDA

The road of passion is no king's highway,
Mapped out with finger-posts for all to see,
But each soul journeys on it separately,
And only those who have walked its mazes through
Remember on what paths the wild flowers grew.

Ay, who shall say? Nor had the truth been sung,
Save for the incontinence of Manton's tongue,
Wagging in argument on certain themes,
With boast of craft in pleasure's stratagems.
"For Love" ('twas thus he made his parable
In cynic phrase, as hero of his tale,
One evening when the others were abed,
And we two sat on smoking, head to head,
Discoursing in that tone of men scarce friends,
Who prate philosophy to candle ends),
"Love, though its laws have not as yet been written
By any Balzac for our modern Britain,
And though perhaps there is no strategy
Youth can quite count upon or argue by,
Is none the less an art, with some few rules
Wise men observe, who would outrun the fools.
Now, for myself" (here Manton spread his hands
With professorial wave in white wrist-bands)
"I hold it as a maxim always wise
In making love to deal with contraries.
Colours, books tell us, to be strongly blent,
Need opposite colours for their complement,
And so too women whose ill-reasoning mind
Requires some contradiction to be kind.

"It is not enough in this late year of grace
To answer fools with their own foolishness—
Rather with your best wisdom. You will need
Your folly to perplex some wiser head.

GRISELDA

And so my maxim is, whatever least
Women expect, that thing will serve you best.
Thus, with young souls in their first unfledged years,
Ask their opinion as philosophers :
Consult their knowledge in the ways of life.
The repute of sin will please a too chaste wife.
Your deference keep for harlots : these you touch
Best by your modesty, which makes them blush.
With a proud beauty deal out insolence,
And bear her fence down with a stronger fence.
She will be angry, but a softer cheek
Turn to the smiter who has proved her weak.
And so with wisdom : meet it with surprise,
Laugh at it idly gazing in its eyes,
Leave it no solid ground for its fair feet,
And lead it lightly where love's waters meet.
Even virtue—virtue of the noblest type,
The fair sad woman, whose romance is ripe,
Needs but a little knowledge to be led,
Perhaps less than the rest if truth be said.
You must not parley with her. Words are vain,
And you might wake some half forgotten pain.
Avoid her soul. It is a place too strong
For your assaulting, and a siege were long.
Others have failed before it. Touch it not,
But march beyond, nor fire a single shot.
The fields of pleasure less defended lie :
These are your vantage-ground for victory.
Strike boldly for possession and command ;
An hour may win it, if you hold her hand.
I knew one once " : . . .

I would have stopped him here
But for the shame which held me prisoner ;
And his undaunted, reassuring smile,

GRISELDA

Commanding confidence. "I knew once on a while,"
He said, "a woman whom the world called proud,
A saintly soul, untouched by the vain crowd,
Who had survived all battle, siege, and sack,
Love ever led with armies at his back,
Yet fell at last to the mere accident
Of a chance meeting, for another meant :
Her lover had not dared it, had he known,
But faces in the dark are all as one.
You know the rhyme."

But at this point I rose,
Fearing what worse his folly might disclose,
And having learned my lesson of romance,
A sadder man and wiser for the chance,
Bade him good night : (it was in truth good-bye,
For pretexting next morning some small lie
Of business calling me in haste to town,
I fled the house). He looked me up and down,
Yawned, rose to light his candle at the lamp,
Pressed with warm hand my own hand, which was damp,
And as he sauntered cheerily to bed
I heard him sing—they linger in my head—
The first staves of a ballad, then the fashion
With the young bloods who shape their love and passion
At the music-halls of the Metropolis ;
What I remember of the song was this :

But, no, I cannot write it. There are things
Too bitter in their taste, and this one stings
My soul to a mad anger even yet.
I seem to hear the voices of the pit
Lewdly discoursing of incestuous scenes,
Bottom the weaver's and the enamoured queen's.
Alas, Titania ! thou poor soul, alas !
How art thou fallen, and to what an ass !

CHAPTER V

GRISELDA's madness lasted forty days,
Forty eternities ! Men went their ways,
And suns arose and set, and women smiled,
And tongues wagged lightly in impeachment wild
Of Lady L.'s adventure. She was gone,
None knew by whom escorted or alone,
Or why or whither, only that one morning,
Without pretext or subterfuge or warning,
She had disappeared in silence from L. House,
Leaving her lord in multitudinous
And agonised conjecture of her fate :
So the tale went. And truly less sedate
Than his wont was in intricate affairs,
Such as his Garter or his lack of heirs,
Lord L. was seen in this new tribulation.
Griselda long had been his life's equation,
The pivot of his dealings with the world,
The mainstay of his comfort, all now hurled
To unforeseen confusion by her flight :
There was need of action swift and definite.
Where was she ? Who could tell him ? Divers visions
Passed through his fancy—thieves, and street collisions
And all the hundred accidents of towns,
From broken axle-trees to broken crowns.
In vain he questioned ; no response was made
More than the fact that, as already said,

GRISELDA

My lady, unattended and on foot
(A sad imprudence here Lord L. took note),
Had gone out dressed in a black morning gown
And dark tweed waterproof, 'twixt twelve and one,
Leaving no orders to her maid, or plan
About her carriage to or groom or man.
Such was in sum the downstairs' evidence.
The hall porter, a man of ponderous sense,
Averred her ladyship had eastward turned
From the front door, and some small credit earned
For the suggestion that her steps were bent
To Whitechapel on merciful intent,
A visit of compassion to the poor,
A clue which led to a commissioner
Being sent for in hot haste from Scotland Yard.
And so the news was bruited abroad.

It reached my ears among the earliest,
And from Lord L. himself, whose long suppressed
Emotion found its vent one afternoon
On me, the only listener left in town.
His thoughts now ran on "a religious craze
Of his poor wife's," he said, "in these last days
Indulged beyond all reason." The police
Would listen to no talk of casualties,
Still less of crime, since they had nothing found
In evidence above or under ground,
But held the case to be of simpler kind,
Home left in a disordered state of mind
Lord L. had noticed, now they talked of it
Temper less equable and flightier wit,
"A craving for religious services
And sacred music." Something was amiss,
Or why were they in London in September?
Griselda latterly, he could remember,

GRISELDA

Had raved of a conventual retreat
In terms no Protestant would deem discreet,
As the sole refuge in a world of sin
For human frailty, grief's best anodyne.
"The *Times* was right. Rome threatened to absorb us :
The convents must be searched by *habeas corpus*."

And so I came to help him. I had guessed
From his first word the vainness of his quest,
And half was moved to serve him in a strait
Where her fair fame I loved was in debate,
Yet held my peace, nor hazarded a word
Save of surprise at the strange case I heard,
Till, fortune aiding, I should find the clue
My heart desired to do what I would do.
And not in vain. Night found me duly sped,
Lord L.'s ambassador accredited,
With fullest powers to find and fetch her home,
If need should be, from the Pope's jaws in Rome.

Gods ! what a mission ! First my round I went
Through half the slums of Middlesex and Kent,
Surrey and Essex—this to soothe Lord L.,
Though witless all, as my heart told too well ;
The hospitals no less and casual wards,
Each house as idly as his House of Lords,
And only at the week's end dared to stop
At the one door I knew still housing hope,
Young Manton's chambers. There, with reddened
cheek

I heard the answer given I came to seek :
Manton was gone, his landlady half feared
He too, in some mishap, and disappeared,—
Proof all too positive. His letters lay
A fortnight deep untouched upon the tray.

GRISELDA

She could not forward them or risk a guess
As to his last or likeliest address.
He was in Scotland often at this season,
“ But not without his guns ”—a cogent reason,
And leaving, too, his valet here in town,
Perplexed of what to do or leave undone.
Abroad? Perhaps. If so, his friends might try
As a best chance the Paris Embassy.
He had been there last Spring, and might be now.

Paris! It was enough, I made my bow,
And took my leave. I seemed to touch the thread
Of the blind labyrinth 'twas mine to tread.
Where should they be, in truth, these too fond lovers,
But in the land of all such lawless rovers:
The land of Gautier, Bourget, Maupassant,
Where still “ you can ” makes answer to “ I can't ”:
The fair domain where all romance begins
In a light borderland of venial sins,
But deepening onwards, till the fatal day
Vice swoops upon us, plead we as we may.
Griselda's bonnet o'er the windmills thrown,
Had surely crossed the Seine e'er it came down;
And I, if I would find and bring her back,
Must earlier search the boulevards for her track:
And so to Paris in my zeal I passed,
Breaking my idol, mad Iconoclast.

There is a little inn by Meudon wood
Dear to Parisians in their amorous mood,
A place of rendezvous, where bourgeois meet
Their best beloved in congregation sweet:
Clandestine, undisturbed, illicit loves,
Made half romantic by the adjoining groves,

GRISELDA

So beautiful in spring, with the new green
Clothing the birch stems scattered white between,
Nor yet, in autumn, when the first frosts burn,
And the wind rustles in the reddening fern,
Quite robbed of sentiment for lovers' eyes,
Who seek earth's blessing on a bliss unwise,
And find the happy sanction for their state
In nature's face, unshocked by their debate,
As who should say "Let preachers frown their fill,
Here one approves. 'Tis Eden with us still."

Such fancy, may be, in her too fond heart
Had led Griselda—with her friend—apart,
Yet not apart, from the world's curious gaze,
To this secluded, ill-frequented place :
A compromise of wills and varying moods,
His for gay crowds, her own for solitudes.
Manton knew Paris well, and loved its noise,
Its mirthful parody of serious joys,
Its pomp and circumstance. His wish had been
To flaunt the boulevards with his captured queen,
And make parade of a last triumph won
In the chaste field of prudish Albion,
Outscandalising scandal. Love and he
In any sense but of male vanity,
And the delirium of adventures new
In the world's eye—the thing he next should do—
Were terms diverse and incompatible.
Griselda, to his eyes, was Lady L.,
The fair, the chaste, the unapproached proud name
Men breathed in reverence, woman, all the same,
And not as such, and when the truth was said,
Worth more than others lightlier credited.
It all had been a jest from the beginning,
A *tour de force*, whose wit was in the winning,

GRISELDA

A stroke of fortune and of accident,
The embrace he had told of for another meant,
While she stood grieving for a first grey hair
(A psychologic moment) on the stair,
And, kneeling down, he had adored her foot,
The one weak spot where her self-love had root,
And laughed at her, and told her she was old,
Yet growing tenderer as he grew more bold ;
And so from jest to jest, and chance to chance,
To that last scene at the mad country dance
Where she had played the hoyden, he the swain,
Pretending love till love was in their brain,
And he had followed to her chamber door,
And helped her to undo the dress she wore.

Then the elopement. That had been her doing,
Which he accepted to make good his wooing,
And careless what to both the result might be,
So it but served his end of vanity.
It all had been to this vain boy a whim,
Something grotesque, a play, a pantomime,
Where nothing had been serious but her heart,
And that was soon too tearful for its part.
He wearied in a week of her mature
Old maidish venturings in ways obscure,
Her agony of conscience dimly guessed,
The silences she stifled in her breast,
Her awkwardness—it was his word—in all
That love could teach ; her sighs funereal,
And more the unnatural laughter she essayed
To meet the doubtful sense of things he said.
She was at once too tender and too prim,
Too prudish and too crazed with love and him.
At a month's end his flame had leaped beyond
Already to friends frailer and less fond.

GRISELDA

The light Parisian world of venal charms
Which welcomed him with wide and laughing arms :
There he was happier, more at home, more gay,
King of the " high life," hero of the day.

Griselda, in her sad suburban nook
Watched his departures with a mute rebuke,
Yet daring not to speak. The choice was hers
To stay at home or run the theatres
With her young lover in such company
As her soul loathed. She had tried despairingly
To be one, even as these, for his loved sake,
And would have followed spite of her heart's ache,
But that he hardly further cared to press,
After one failure, stamped with " dowdiness :"
That too had been his word, a bitter word,
Biting and true, which smote her like a sword,
Or rather a whip's sting to her proud cheek,
Leaving her humbled, agonised and weak.

Poor beautiful Griselda ! What was now
The value of thy beauty, chaste as snow
In thy youth's morning, the unchallenged worth
Of thy eyes' kindness, queenliest of the earth ;
The tradition of thy Fra-angelic face,
Blessed as Mary's, and as full of grace ;
The fame which thou despisedst, yet which made
A glory for thee meet for thy dear head ?
What, if in this last crisis of thy fate,
When all a heaven and hell was in debate,
And thy archangel, with the feet of clay,
Stood mocking there in doubt to go or stay,
The unstable fabric of thy woman's dower,
Thy beauty, failed and left thee in *their* power

GRISELDA

Whose only law of beauty was the sting
Lent to man's lust by light bedizening ?
What use was in thy beauty, if alas !
Thou gavest them cause to mock—those tongues of
brass—

At thy too crude and insular attire,
Thy naïvetés of colour, the false fire
Of thy first dallings with the red and white,
Thy sweet pictorial robes, Pre-Raphaelite,
Quaint in their tones and *outrées* in design,
Thy lack of unity and shape and line,
Thy English angularity—who knows,
The less than perfect fitting of thy shoes ?

Griselda, in her flight, had left behind
All but the dress she stood in, too refined,
In her fair righteousness of thought and deed,
To make provision for a future need,
However dire. She was no Israelite
To go forth from her Pharaoh in the night,
With spoils of the Egyptians in her hands,
And had thrown herself on Manton and on France
With a full courage worth a nobler cause,
Grandly oblivious of prudential laws.
Her earliest trouble, marring even the bliss
Of love's first ecstasy, had come of this,
Her want of clothes—a worse and weightier care
At the mere moment than her soul's despair
For its deep fall from virtuous estate.
How should she dress herself, she asked of Fate,
With neither maid, nor money, nor a name ?
It was her first experiment in shame.
Now, after all her poor economies,
This was the ending read in his vexed eyes,
And spoken by his lips : her utmost art

GRISELDA

Had failed to please that idle thing, his heart,
Or even to avert his petulant scorn
For one so little to love's manner born.

And thus I found them, at the angry noon
Of their "red month," the next to honeymoon:
Two silent revellers at a loveless feast,
Scared by hate's morning breaking in their east—
A dawn which was of penance and despair,
With pleasure's ghost to fill the vacant chair
I took it, and was welcomed rapturously,
As a far sail by shipwrecked souls at sea,
An opportune deliverer, timely sent
To break the autumn of their discontent,
And give a pretext to their need grown sore
Of issue from joys dead by any door.

Manton, all confidential from the first,
Told me the tale of his last sins and worst,
As meriting a sympathy not less
Than the best actions virtuous men confess.
He was overwhelmed with women and with debt—
Women who loved him, bills which must be met.
What could he do? Her ladyship was mad—
It was her fault, not his, this escapade.
He had warned her from the first, and as a friend,
That all such frolics had a serious end.
And that to leave her home was the worst way
A woman would who wanted to be gay.

"For look," said he, "we men, who note these things,
And how the unthinking flutterers burn their wings,
Know that a woman, be she what she will,
The fairest, noblest, most adorable,

GRISELDA

Dowered in her home with all seraphic charms,
Whom heaven itself might envy in your arms,
A paragon of pleasure undenied
At her own chaste, respectable fireside,
Becomes, what shall I say, when she steps down
From the high world of her untouched renown—
A something differing in no serious mood
From the sad rest of the light sisterhood :
Perhaps indeed more troublesome than these,
Because she keenlier feels the agonies :
A wounded soul, who has not even the wit
To hide its hurt and make a jest of it ;
A maid of Astolat, launched in her barge,
A corpse on all the world, a *femme à charge*."

"'Tis not," he argued, "our poor human sins
That make us what we are when shame begins,
But the world pointing at our naked state :
Then we are shocked and humbled at our fate,
Silent and shamed in all we honour most—
For what is virtue but the right to boast ?
A married woman's love, three weeks from home,
Is the absurdest thing in Christendom,
Dull as a *ménage* in the demi-monde
And dismallier far by reason of the bond.
All this I told my lady ere we went,
But warning wasted is on sentiment.
You see the net result here in one word,
A crying woman and a lover bored."

So far young Manton. She for whom I came,
Griseida's self, sweet soul, in her new shame
Essayed awhile to hide from me the truth
Of this last hap of her belated youth,
Her disillusion with her graceless lover

GRISELDA

She made sad cloaks for him which could not cover
His great unworthiness and her despair,
All with a frightened, half-maternal air,
Most pitiful and touching. To my plea,
Urging her home, she answered mournfully,
That she was bound now to her way of life,
And owed herself no less than as his wife
To him she had chosen out of all mankind.
'Twas better to be foolish, even blind,
If he had faults, so she could serve him still—
And this had been her promise and her will.
She would not hear of duties owed elsewhere :
What was she to Lord L., or he to her ?
I need not speak of it. And yet she clung
To my protecting presence in her wrong ;
And once, when Manton's jibes made bitterer play,
Implored me with appealing eyes to stay.
And so I lingered on.

Those autumn days,
Spent with Griselda in the woodland ways
Of Meudon with her lover, or alone,
When his mad fancies carried him to town,
Remain to me an unsubstantial act
Of dreaming fancy, rather than the fact
Of any waking moment in my past,
The sweetest, saddest, and with her the last—
For suddenly they ended.

We had been
One Sunday for a jaunt upon the Seine,
We two—in Manton's absence, now prolonged
To a third night—and in a steamboat, thronged
With idle bourgeois folk, whom the last glory
Of a late autumn had sent forth in foray

GRISELDA

To Passy and St. Cloud, from stage to stage,
Had made with heavy souls our pilgrimage ;
And homeward turning and with little zest,
The fair day done, to love's deserted nest
Had come with lagging feet and weary eyes,
Expectant still of some new dark surprise,
When the blow fell unsparing on her head,
Already by what fortunes buffeted.

How did it happen, that last tragedy?—
For tragedy it was, let none deny,
Though all ignoble. Every soul of us
Touches one moment in death's darkened house
The plane of the heroic, and compels
Men's laughter into tears—ay, heaven's and hell's.
How did it happen? There was that upon
Their faces at the door more than the tone
Of their replies, that warned us of the thing
We had not looked for in our questioning ;
And our lips faltered, and our ears, afraid,
Shrank from more hearing. What was it they said
In their fool's jargon, that he lay upstairs ?
He? Manton? The dispenser of our cares ?
The mountebank young reveller ? Suffering ? Ill ?
And she, poor soul, that suffered at his will !
A sinister case ? Not dying ? Pitiful God !
Truly Thou smitest blindly with Thy rod.
For Manton was not worthy to die young,
Beloved by her with blessings on her tongue.
And such a cause of death !

She never heard
The whole truth told, for each one spared his word,
And he lay mute for ever. But to me
The thing was storied void of mystery,

GRISELDA

And thus they told it. Hardly had we gone
On our sad river outing, when from town
Manton had come with a gay troop of friends,
Such as the *coulisse* of the opera lends,
To breakfast at the inn and spend the day
In mirthful noise, as was his vagrant way.
A drunken frolic, and most insolent
To her whose honour with his own was blent,
To end in this last tragedy. None knew
Quite how it happened, or a cause could shew
Further than this, that, rising from the table
The last to go, with steps perhaps unstable—
For they had feasted freely, and the stair
Was steep and iron-edged, and needed care ;
And singing, as he went, the selfsame song
Which I remembered, to the laughing throng,
He had slipped his length, and fallen feet-first down.
When they picked him up his power to move was
gone,
Though he could speak. They laid him on a bed,
Her bed, Griselda's, and called in with speed
Such help of doctors and commissioners
As law prescribed, and medicine for their fears.
'Twas his last night.

There, in Griselda's hands,
Young Jerry Manton lay with the last sands
Of his life's hour-glass trickling to its close,
Griselda watching, with what thoughts, God knows.
We did not speak. But her lips moved in prayer,
And mine too, in the way of man's despair.
I did not love him, yet a human pity
Softened my eyes. Afar, from the great city,
The sound came to us of the eternal hum,
Unceasing, changeless, pregnant with all doom

GRISELDA

Of insolent life that rises from its streets,
The pulse of sin which ever beats and beats,
Wearying the ears of God. O Paris, Paris !
What doom is thine for every soul that carries
Too long with thee, a stranger in thy arms.
Thy smiles are incantations, thy brave charms
Death to thy lovers. Each gay mother's son,
Smitten with love for thee, is straight undone.
And lo the chariot wheels upon thy ways !
And a new garland hung in *Père la Chaise* !

Poor soul ! I turned and looked into the night,
Through the uncurtained windows, and there bright
Saw the mute twinkle of a thousand stars.
One night ! the least in all time's calendars,
Yet fraught with what a meaning for this one !
One star, the least of all that million !
One room in that one city ! Yet for him
The universe there was of space and time.
What were his thoughts ? In that chaotic soul,
Home of sad jests, obscene, unbeautiful,
Mired with the earthiest of brute desires,
And lit to sentience only with lewd fires,
Was there no secret, undisturbed, fair place
Watered with love and favoured with God's grace
To which the wounded consciousness had fled
For its last refuge from a world of dread ?
Was his soul touched to tenderness, to awe,
To softer recollection ? All we saw
Was the maimed body gasping forth its breath,
A rigid setting of the silent teeth,
And the hands trembling. Death was with us there.
But where was he—O heaven of pity ! where ?

We watched till morning by the dying man,
She weeping silently, I grieved and wan,

GRISELDA

And still he moved not. But with the first break
Of day in the window panes we saw him make
A sign as if of speaking. Pressing near—
For his lips moved, Griselda deemed, in prayer—
We heard him make profession of his faith,
As a man of pleasure face to face with death,
A kind of gambler's Athanasian Creed,
Repeated at the hour of his last need.
"Five sovereigns," said he, steadying his will,
As in defiance of death's power to kill,
And with that smile of a superior mind,
Which was his strength in dealing with mankind,
The world of sporting jargon and gay livers.
"Five sovereigns is a fiver, and five fivers
A pony, and five ponies are a hundred—
No four," he added, seeing he had blundered.
"Four to the hundred and *five* centuries
Make up the monkey." From his dying eyes
The smile of triumph faded. "There I've done it,"
He said, "but there was no great odds upon it,
You see with a broken back."

He spoke no more,
And in another hour had passed the door
Which shuts the living from eternity.
Where was he? God of pity, where was he?

This was the end of Lady L.'s romance.

When we had buried him, as they do in France,
In a tomb inscribed "*à perpétuité*"
(Formally rented till the Judgment Day),
She put off black, and shed no further tears;
Her face for the first time showed all its years,
But not a trace beyond. Without demur
She gave adhesion to my plans for her,

GRISELDA

And we went home to London and Lord L.,
Silent together, by the next night's mail.
She had been six weeks away.

The interview

Between them was dramatic. I, who knew
Her whole mad secret, and had seen her soul
Stripped of its covering, and without control,
Bowed down by circumstance and galled with shame,
Yielding to wounds and griefs without a name,
Had feared for her a wild unhappy scene.
I held Lord L. for the least stern of men,
And yet I dared not hope even he would crave
No explanation e'er he quite forgave.

I was with them when they met, unwilling third,
In their mute bandying of the unspoken word.
Lord L. essayed to speak. I saw his face
Made up for a high act of tragic grace
As he came forward. It was grave and mild,
A father's welcoming a truant child,
Forgiving, yet intent to mark the pain
With hope "the thing should not occur again."
His lips began to move as to some speech
Framed in this sense, as one might gently preach
A word in season to too gadding wives
Of duties owed, at least by those whose lives
Moved in high places. But it died unsaid.
There was that about Griselda that forbade
Marital questionings. Her queenly eyes
Met his with a mute answer of surprise,
Marking the unseemliness of all display
More strongly than with words, as who should say
Noblesse oblige. She took his outstretched hand,
And kissed his cheek, but would not understand

GRISELDA

A word of his reproaches. Even I,
With my full knowledge and no more a boy,
But versed by years in the world's wickedness,
And open-eyed to her, alas! no less
Than to all womanhood, even I felt shame,
And half absolved her in my mind from blame.
And he, how could he less? He was but human,
The fortunate husband of how fair a woman!
He stammered his excuses.

What she told
When I had left them (since all coin is gold
To those who would believe, and who the key
Hold of their eyes, in blind faith's alchemy)
I never learned.

I did not linger on,
Seeing her peril past and the day won,
But took my leave. She led me to the door
With her old kindness of the days of yore,
And thanked me as one thanks for little things.
"You have been," she said, "an angel without wings,
And I shall not forget,—nor will Lord L. ;
And yet," she said, with an imperceptible
Change in her voice, "there are things the world will say
Which are neither just nor kind, and, if to-day
We part awhile, remember we are friends,
If not now later. Time will make amends,
And we shall meet again." I pressed her hand
A moment to my lips. "I understand,"
I said, and gazed a last time in her eyes ;
"Say all you will. I am your sacrifice."

And so, in truth, it was. Henceforth there lay
A gulf between us, widening with delay,

GRISELDA

And which our souls were impotent to pass,
The gulf of a dead secret ; and, alas !
Who knows what subtle treacheries within,
For virtue rends its witnesses of sin,
And hearts are strangely fashioned by their fears.
We met no more in friendship through the years,
Although I held her secret as my own,
And fought her battles, her best champion,
On many a stricken field in scandal's war,
Till all was well forgotten. From afar
I watched her fortunes still with tenderness,
Yet sadly, as cast out of Paradise.
For ever, spite her promise, from that day,
When I met L., he looked another way ;
And she, Griselda, was reserved and chill.
I had behaved, her women friends said, ill,
And caused a needless scandal in her life,
—They told not what. Enough, that as a wife
She had been compelled to close her doors on me,
And that her lord knew all the iniquity.

And so I bore the burden of her sin.

What more shall I relate ? The cynic vein
Has overwhelmed my tale, and I must stop.
Its heroine lived to justify all hope
Of her long-suffering lord, that out of pain
Blessings would grow, and his house smile again
With the fulfilled expectance of an heir.
Griselda sat no longer in despair,
Nor wasted her full life on dreams of folly ;
She had little time for moods of melancholy,
Or heart to venture further in love's ways ;
She was again the theme of all men's praise,
And suffered no man's passion. Once a year,

GRISELDA

In the late autumn, when the leaves grew sere,
She made retreat to a lay sisterhood,
And lived awhile there for her soul's more good,
In pious meditation, fasts and prayer.
Some say she wore concealed a shirt of hair
Under her dresses, even at court balls,
And certain 'tis that all Rome's rituals
Were followed daily at the private Mass
In her new chantry built behind Hans Place.
Lord L. approved of all she did, even this,
Strange as it seemed to his old fashionedness.

He, gentle soul, grown garrulous with years,
Prosed of her virtues to all listeners,
And of their son's, the child of his old age,
A prodigy of beauty and ways sage.
It was a vow, he said, once made in Rome,
Had brought them this chief treasure of their home.
A vow! The light world laughed—for miracles
Are not believed in now, except as hell's.
And yet the ways of God are passing strange.
And this is certain (and therein the range
Of my long tale is reached, and I am free).
—There is at Ostia, close beside the sea,
A convent church, the same where years ago
Griselda kneeled in tears and made her vow;
And in that shrine, beneath the crucifix,
They show a votive offering, candlesticks
Of more than common workmanship and size,
And underneath inscribed the votary's
Name in initials, and the date, all told,
Hall-marked in England, and of massive gold.

SANCHO SANCHEZ

I

SANCHO SANCHEZ lay a-dying in the house of Mariquita,
For his life ebbed with the ebbing of the red wound in
his side.
And he lay there as they left him when he came from the
Corrida
In his gold embroidered jacket and his red cloak and his
pride.

II

But at cockcrow in the morning, when the convents of
Sevilla
Suddenly rang aloud to matins, Sanchez wakened with a
cry,
And he called to Mariquita, bade her summon his cuadrilla,
That they all might stand around him in the hour when
he should die.

III

For he thought in his bold bosom, "I have ventured with
them often,
And have led the way to honour upon every ring in Spain.
And now in this the hardest of the fields that I have
fought in
I would choose that every face of them were witness of
my pain.

SANCHO SANCHEZ

IV

“ For their stern eyes would upbraid me if I went down to
the battle
Without a friend to cheer me, or at least a fool to hiss.
And they hold it all unworthy men should die like fatted
cattle
Striken singly in the darkness at the shambles of Cadiz.”

V

Then he bade the lamps be lighted, and he made them
bring a mirror,
Lest his cheeks should have grown paler in the watches
of the night.
For he feared lest his disciples should mistrust his soul of
terror,
When they came to look upon him, if they saw his face
was white.

VI

Oh, long time in the mirror did he look with awful smiling
At the eyes which gazed out at him, while the women
watched him mute.
And he marked how death's white fingers had been
clammily defiling
The redness of God's image and had wiped the sunburns
out.

VII

Then he spake, “ Go fetch the carmine from the side
drawer of the table,
Where Mariquita keeps it.” But, when it was not found,
“ Tis no matter,” answered Sanchez, “ we must do what we
are able.”
And he painted his cheeks' paleness with the red blood
of his wound.

SANCHO SANCHEZ

VIII

And anon there came a murmur as of voices and a humming
On the staircase, and he knew them by their footsteps at
the door.
And he leant up on his pillow that his eyes might see them
coming
In their order of the plaza as they strode across the floor.

IX

And when they stood around him, in their stately mantas
folded,
With a solemn grief outlawing the brute laughter of their
eyes,
You had deemed them in the lamplight to be bronzen
statues moulded
Of the powers of Nature yielding a brave man in sacrifice.

X

But the soul of Sanchez quailed not, and he laughed in
their sad faces,
Crying loud to Mariquita for the Valdepeñas wine.
“A fair pig-skin, Caballeros, blushes here for your embraces.
And I drink to you your fortune, and I pray you drink to
mine.”

XI

Then they filled their leathern flagons, and they held them
up together
In a ghastly expectation till their chief should give the
sign.
And the red wine in the silence flowed like blood adown
the leather.
And the red blood from the pillow trickled drop by drop
like wine.

SANCHO SANCHEZ

XII

Spake the master, " Ere I pledge you, look upon me, men,
and hearken,

For I have a thing to utter, and a dying man is wise.
Death is weighing down my eyelids. Silently your faces
darken.

But another torch is lighted than the daylight in my eyes.

XIII

" Life, I see it now as never I had thought to comprehend it,
Like the lines which old Manola used to write upon the
sand,

And we looked on in wonder nor guessed till it was ended
The birds and trees and faces which were growing from
her hand.

XIV

" Meaning was there from the outset, glorious meaning in
our calling,

In the voice of emulation and our boyhood's pride of
soul,
From the day when first the capa from our father's shoulders
falling

We were seized with inspiration and rushed out upon the
bull.

XV

" Meaning was there in our courage and the calm of our
demeanour,

For there stood a foe before us which had need of all our
skill.

And our lives were as the programme, and the world was
our arena,

And the wicked beast was death, and the horns of death
were hell.

SANCHO SANCHEZ

XVI

“ And the boast of our profession was a bulwark against
danger
With its fearless expectation of what good or ill may
come,
For the very prince of darkness shall burst forth on us no
stranger
When the doors of death fly open to the rolling of the
drum.

XVII

“ As I lay here in the darkness, I beheld a sign from heaven,
Standing close a golden angel by the footpost of my bed,
And in his hand a letter with the seal and arms engraven
Of the glorious San Fernando which he bade me read
and read.

XVIII

“ And the message of his master, the blessed king my
patron,
Was to bid me in his honour to hold myself at need
For this very day and morning of his feast and celebration,
And in pledge of his high favour he had sent me his own
steed.

XIX

“ For the lists of heaven were open, and that day they had
decreed it
There should be a special function for the glory of his
name.
And the beasts were Sevillanos, and a master's hand was
needed
Lest the swords of heaven should falter and the Saint be
put to shame.

SANCHO SANCHEZ

xx

“And I heard the potro stamping in the street, and would
have risen

But that Mariquita held me and the women and my
wound.

And, though the angel left me, it was truth and not a vision,
And I know the Saint has called me, and the place where
I am bound.

xxi

“I shall fight this day in heaven, and, though all hell shall
assail me,

I have hope of a good issue, for perhaps I have some skill,
And perhaps, if I should stumble or if my hand should fail
me,

There are others in the plaza who have vowed me less
than ill.

xxii

“And my mantle of salvation is the faith which is our
charter,

And the Virgin of the Pillar my protector and reward,
And the hosts of heaven my witness and each Spanish Saint
and Martyr,

And our Lord Don Santiago himself has lent the sword.”

xxiii

Thus he spoke, and on his speaking fell a silence and a
wonder,

While the eyes of his companions turned in awe from
each to each,

And they waited in expectance for the gates to roll
asunder,

And the voices of the angels to command him to the
breach,—

SANCHO SANCHEZ

XXIV

Waited till the sun uprising sent his glory through the
chamber,
And the spent lamps paled and flickered on the shame
of their dismay,
And the dying man transfigured passed in silence from his
slumber,
Like a king to coronation, in the light of his new day.

XXV

Only they that stood the closest say the pale lips curved
and parted,
And the eyes flashed out in battle, and the fingers sought
the sword.
“Tis the President has called him,” said Fernandez the
true hearted,
“He has thrown his hat behind him for the glory of the
Lord!”

ACROSS THE PAMPAS

I

Dost thou remember, oh, dost thou remember,
Here as we sit at home and take our rest,
How we went out one morning on a venture
In the West ?

II

Hast thou forgotten in these English hedgerows,
How the great Pampas rolled out like the sea ?
Never a daisy in that mighty meadow !
Never a tree !

III

Full were our hearts upon that sunny morning ;
Stout-handed and stout-hearted went we forth.
The warm wind in our faces breathed us fortune
From the North ;

IV

And high in heaven the sun stood for a token.
We had no other sign by which to steer.
No landmark is there in the earth's great ocean,
For mariner.

ACROSS THE PAMPAS

V

Dost thou remember how, when night was falling,
There in the middle plain, as best we might,
We set our little tent up as a fortress
For the night ?

VI

Dost thou remember how, through the night watches,
We listened to the voices of the plain,
The owls and plovers and the bold bischachas,
Talking like men ?

VII

Drowsy we sat, and watched our horses feeding,
Dim through the night, while over the tent's mouth
The cross was turning like a clock and reeling
In the South.

VIII

But, as the night grew out and we grew chilly,
Under our blankets safe we crept and warm,
Full of good heart and each with loaded pistols
Close to his arm ;

IX

And so dreamed pleasant dreams of far off faces,
And trees and fields which we had loved in youth,
All in a maze of present apprehension
Mingled uncouth ;

ACROSS THE PAMPAS

X

And how we travelled on and ever onwards,
Still in the red path of the setting sun,
Until into the heart of a great woodland
We had come ;

XI

And there saw, round about our strange encampment,
Flocks of bright birds which flew and screamed at us,
Red cardinals and woodpeckers and parrots
Multitudinous ;

XII

And on the lake black-headed swans were sailing,
And in the morning to the water's brink
Flamingoes, like the rising sun, came wading
Down to drink.

XIII

Dost thou remember, oh dost thou remember,
How, in that fatal wood, the mancaron
Found out a poisonous herb before his fellows,
And fed thereon ;

XIV

And how we left him, and how Cæsar sickened,
And how the sky drew dark and overcast,
And how two tragic days we rode on silent
In the blast ;

ACROSS THE PAMPAS

xv

And how the wind grew icy and more icy,
Until we could not feel our hands or feet,
As sick at heart we sought in vain a hiding
From the sleet ;

xvi

Lighting at last on a deserted post house,
Where we found shelter from the wind, but nought
Of entertainment for our souls or comfort
Of any sort ;

xvii

And how in that wild pass brave Cæsar dying
Stretched out his hand towards the promised land,
And saw as in a dream the white hills lying
Close at hand,—

xviii

For, e'er the sun set, suddenly that evening,
The great plain opened out beneath our feet,
And, in a valley far below, lay gleaming,
With square and street,

xix

And spire and dome and pinnacle, uprising
White on the bosom of a mountain slope,
To our amazement bodily the city
Of our hope.

ACROSS THE PAMPAS

XX

Dost thou remember, oh, dost thou remember,
How the bells rang as, sick and travelworn,
A weary crew, we made our solemn entry
To the town?

XXI

Strangely, as phantoms out of the great desert,
We came into the city, and at last
Heard sound of Christian singing in the churches
As we passed :

XXII

And laid at length our weary limbs in rapture
Between the clean sheets of a Christian bed.
Oh! there are things I think we shall remember
When we are dead.

THE OLD SQUIRE

I

I LIKE the hunting of the hare
Better than that of the fox ;
I like the joyous morning air,
And the crowing of the cocks.

II

I like the calm of the early fields,
The ducks asleep by the lake,
The quiet hour which Nature yields,
Before mankind is awake.

III

I like the pheasants and feeding things
Of the unsuspecting morn ;
I like the flap of the wood-pigeon's wings
As she rises from the corn.

IV

I like the blackbird's shriek, and his rush
From the turnips as I pass by,
And the partridge hiding her head in a bush
For her young ones cannot fly.

THE OLD SQUIRE

V

I like these things, and I like to ride
When all the world is in bed,
To the top of the hill where the sky grows wide,
And where the sun grows red.

VI

The beagles at my horse heels trot,
In silence after me ;
There's Ruby, Roger, Diamond, Dot,
Old Slut and Margery,—

VII

A score of names well used, and dear,
The names my childhood knew ;
The horn, with which I rouse their cheer,
Is the horn my father blew.

VIII

I like the hunting of the hare
Better than that of the fox ;
The new world still is all less fair
Than the old world it mocks.

IX

I covet not a wider range
Than these dear manors give ;
I take my pleasures without change,
And as I lived I live.

THE OLD SQUIRE

X

I leave my neighbours to their thought ;
My choice it is, and pride,
On my own lands to find my sport,
In my own fields to ride.

XI

The hare herself no better loves
The field where she was bred,
Than I the habit of these groves,
My own inherited.

XII

I know my quarries every one,
The meuse where she sits low ;
The road she chose to-day was run
A hundred years ago.

XIII

The lags, the gills, the forest ways,
The hedgerows one and all,
These are the kingdoms of my chase,
And bounded by my wall ;

XIV

Nor has the world a better thing,
Though one should search it round,
Than thus to live one's own sole king,
Upon one's own sole ground.

THE OLD SQUIRE

XV

I like the hunting of the hare ;
It brings me, day by day,
The memory of old days as fair,
With dead men past away.

XVI

To these, as homeward still I ply
And pass the churchyard gate,
Where all are laid as I must lie,
I stop and raise my hat.

XVII

I like the hunting of the hare ;
New sports I hold in scorn.
I like to be as my fathers were,
In the days e'er I was born.

OH FOR A DAY OF SPRING

I

Oh for a day of Spring
A day of flowers and folly,
Of birds that pipe and sing
And boyhood's melancholy !
I would not grudge the laughter,
The tears that followed after.

II

Oh for a day of youth,
A day of strength and passion,
Of words that told the truth,
And deeds the truth would fashion !
I would not leave untasted
One glory while it lasted.

III

Oh for a day of days,
A day with you and pleasure,
Of love in all its ways,
And life in all its measure !
Win me that day from sorrow
And let me die to-morrow.

THE STRICKEN HART

THE stricken hart had fled the brake,
His courage spent for life's dear sake.
He came to die beside the lake.

The golden trout leaped up to view,
The moorfowl clapped his wings and crew,
The swallow brushed him as she flew.

He looked upon the glorious sun,
His blood dropped slowly on the stone,
He loved the life so nearly won,

And then he died. The ravens found
A carcase couched upon the ground,
They said their god had dealt the wound.

The Eternal Father calmly shook
One page untitled from life's book.
Few words. None ever cared to look.

Yet woe for life thus idly riven
He blindly loved what God had given,
And love, some say, has conquered Heaven.

THE BROKEN PITCHER

I

ACCURSED be the hour of that sad day
The careless potter put his hand to thee,
And dared to fashion out of common clay
So pure a shape as thou didst seem to me.

II

An idle boy, when vintage was begun,
I passed and saw thy beauty for my sin,
And poured unheedingly till it was done
The red wine of my love's first gathering in.

III

And thou, ah! thou didst look at me and smile
To see me give with such ungrudging hand,
As taking all to thy dear heart, the while
It only fell upon the thirsty sand.

IV

Sad pitcher, thou wast broken at the well,
Ere yet the shepherd's lip had tasted thine.
A god had lost in thee his hydromel,
As I have wasted my poor wealth of wine.

THE BROKEN PITCHER

v

Yet, wherefore wast thou made so fair a thing?
Or why of clay, whose fabric rightly were
Of finest gold, new-fashioned for a king,
And framed by some divine artificer?

vi

I will not curse thee, thou poor shape of clay,
That thou art other than thou seemed to be,
Yet I will break thee, that no passer may
Unthinking break another heart on thee.

IN THE NIGHT

I

WHERE art thou, thou lost face,
Which, yet a little while, wert making mirth
At these new years which seemed too sad to be?
Where art thou fled which for a minute's space
Shut out the world and wert my world to me?
And now a corner of this idle Earth,
A broken shadow by the day forgot
Is wide enough to be thy hiding place,
And thou art shrunk away and needest not
The darkness of this night to cover thee.

II

Where art thou hidden? In the boundless air
My hands go forth to thee, and search and feel
As through the universe. I hold the night
Caught in my arms, and yet thou art not there.
Where art thou? What if I should strike a light
So suddenly that thou couldst never steal
Back to thy shadows? What if I should find
Thee standing close to me with all thy hair
Trailing about me and thy eyes grown blind
With looking at me vainly through the night?

IN THE NIGHT

III

There are three rings upon thy hand to-night,
One with a sapphire stone, and one there is
Coiled like a snake, and one on which my name
Is written in strange gems. By this dim light
I cannot read if it be writ the same.
See, I have worn no other ring but this !
Why dost thou look at it with eyes estranged ?
Is it not thine ?—Ah, God ! Thou readest right !
And it is changed, and thou and I are changed,
And I have written there another name.

IV

Oh, happiness, how has it slipped away !
We, who once lived and held it in our hand !
What is the rest that these new years can bring ?
Did we not love it in our love's to-day,
And pleasure which was so divine a thing,
The sweetest and most strange to understand ?
And that is why it left regret behind,
As though a wild bird suddenly should stay
A moment at our side and we should find
When we looked up that it had taken wing.

V

And thou, hast thou forgotten how to love ?
Hast thou no kissing in thy lips ? Thy tongue,
Has it no secret whisper for my ear ?
I have been watching thee to see thee move
A little closer to my side in fear

IN THE NIGHT

Of the long night. Oh, there is room among
The pillows for thy head if thou wouldst sleep.
And thou art cold, and I would wrap my love
To my warm breast and so my vigil keep
And be alone with darkness and with her.

VI

Thou standest with thy hand upon my heart,
As once thou used to stand, to feel it beat.
Doth it beat calmer now than in those days?
Thy foolish finger tips will leave a smart,
If they so press upon my side. Thy gaze
Is burning me. Oh, speak a word and cheat
This darkness into pain, if pain must be,
And wake me back to sorrow with a start,
For I am weary of the night and thee,
And thy strange silence and thy stranger face.

VII

Canst thou not speak? Thy tale was but begun.
How can I answer thee a tale untold?
Whisper it quick before the morning break.
How loud thou weapest! Listen, there is one
Dreaming beside me who must not awake.
Close in my ear!—Ah! child, thy lips are cold,
Because thou art forsaken.—Misery!
Is there not room enough beneath the sun
For her, and thee, and me? . . .

TO HESTER ON THE STAIR

I

HESTER, creature of my love,
What is this? You love not me?
On the stair you stand above,
Looking down distrustfully
With the corners of your eyes
Watching me in mute surprise,
Me, your father, only me.

II

Hester, why this foolish terror,
You who know me and my ways?
Was my love so writ in error
That it needed your disgrace?
Is your doubt of locks grown thin,
Or the beard which hides his chin,
His, your father's chin and face?

III

Hester, we were fools of passion
When our last good-byes were smiled.
Now you stand in your strange fashion

TO HESTER ON THE STAIR

By my kisses unbeguiled,
With your light foot turned to flee
While I press you to my knee,
You, my child, my only child.

IV

Listen, Hester, I am able
Still to flatter and be fond :
You the wise crow of the fable
Perched above me and beyond.
Foolish ! Not one word you speak
To my praises of your cheek,
Not one sound, one only sound.

V

Be it so. My love you mock it,
And my sighs are empty wind.
See, I shut my heart and lock it
From your laughing eyes unkind.
Yet, remember this last word,
Love is two-edged like a sword.
Mind this only, only mind.

A DREAM

I

I DREAMED
A dream of you,
Not as you seemed
When you were late unkind,
And blind
To my eyes' pleading for a debt long due,
But touched and true
And all inclined
To tenderest fancies on love's inmost theme.
How sweet you were to me and, ah, how kind
In that dear dream !

II

I felt
Your lips on mine
Mingle and melt,
And your cheek touch my cheek.
I, weak
With vain desires and askings for a sign
Of love divine,
Found my grief break,
And wept and wept in an unending stream
Of sudden joy set free, yet could not speak,
Dumb in my dream.

A DREAM

III

I knew
You loved me then,
And I knew too
The bliss of souls in Heaven
New shriven,
Who look with pity on still sinning men,
And turn again
To be forgiven
In the dear arms of their God holding them,
And spend themselves in praise from morn till even
Nor break their dream.

IV

I woke
In my mid bliss,
At midnight's stroke,
And knew you lost and gone.
Forlorn
I called you back to my unfinished kiss,
But only this
One word of scorn,
You answered me, "'Twas better loved to seem
Than loved to be," since all love is forsworn,
Always a dream.

ON THE WAY TO CHURCH

I

THERE is one I know. I see her sometimes pass
In the morning streets upon her way to mass,
A calm sweet woman with unearthly eyes.
Men turn to look at her, but ever stop,
Reading in those blue depths the death of hope
And a wise chastisement for thoughts unwise.

II

Pure is her brow as of a marble Saint.
Her brown hair pencils it with ripples faint.
There is no shadow on it and no light.
Her cheeks are pale like lilies in eclipse.
Hardly a little redness on her lips
Paints the sad smile where all the rest is white.

III

Tall is she and bent forward like a reed
Which the wind toys with as she walks with speed :
Girl-like her limbs and virginal her waist.
Of the world's wonders there is none so sweet
As this, the summer lightning of her feet,
Speeding her onward like a fawn in haste.

ON THE WAY TO CHURCH

IV

What is her secret? All the world has tried
To guess it. One I knew in guessing died
And was no wiser for his mortal pain.
Each has turned sadder from the thankless quest,
And gone back silent, even if he guessed,
Knowing all answer would be counted vain.

V

I knew her once. I know her not to-day.
Our eyes meet sometimes, but hers turn away
Quicker from mine than from the rest that look.
Her pale cheek quivers, a flush comes and goes,
As in the presence of a soul that knows,
And her hands tighten on her missal book.

VI

Men have done evil yet have won to Heaven,
Lived in blood guiltiness yet died forgiven.
May I not, I too, one day win my grace?
Ah no! The sacrilege of this worst sin
Outweighs all grace. I dare not enter in
Nor kneel, God's robber, near that angel face.

RECOLLECTIONS OF CHILDHOOD

I

A LITTLE child, he gazed with fearless eyes
On each new wonder of the wonderful earth.
The little things he chiefly counted prize,
The flowers and creeping beasts upon the ground
He called his own, his hoards of mighty worth ;
And each new treasure that his eyes had found
Must have a name which he would stop to hear,
And, when they told it, he would catch the sound
And fashion it to suit his childish ear.

II

And, when he played, 'twas with the hollow shells,
Which lay in myriads strewn by summer seas ;
And, when he slept at noon, the yellow bells
Of cowslip buds still nodded in his hand.
He never woke, although the humming bees
Were busy as young elves in fairy land
Among the flowers. But once upon her knee
His mother set him, and she spoke strange words
Of many things he could not understand,
And how the world was rounded by the sea.
He sat and listened to the chirping birds ;
And yet he felt a nameless mystery.

RECOLLECTIONS OF CHILDHOOD

III

The sad winds moaned through the long autumn night
And creaked among the timbers of the house.
The smouldering fire shot sudden sparks of light.
"The ghosts are all abroad," the servants said,
"Tis they who send down coffins for the dead."
And at the word a little hungry mouse
Pattered behind the wainscote. All his breath
He held in terror, and a curious dread
Pictured wild faces looking down at him,
When the lamp flickered and the fire burnt dim ;
And some one breathed to him the name of death.

IV

And now the flowers and insects, which before
He loved alike, had grown mysterious ;
And, when he saw a spider on the floor,
He shrank away as from a thing of fear.
There were dark corners, too, within the house,
Where little woodlice lay curled up asleep.
A month ago and he had held them dear,
And now he scarcely dared at them to peep.
And, when he stood again beside the sea,
The waves rose up as if to drag him in ;
And once a crab he seized unwittingly
Turned round and bit him with its ragged fin.
He saw the blood, and he was like to die.

V

Then in the night he found himself alone,
Watching the rushlight flicker on the wall,
Until the curtains seemed to bend and shake

RECOLLECTIONS OF CHILDHOOD

With formless things which in the darkness went,
And underneath the counterpane would crawl
To strangle him. He dared not shriek nor cry,
Though wild fear held him for his punishment ;
And, though his heart was stifled with his tears,
They could not ease his pain, and he must lie
Alone with horror, till the dawn should break ;
And, when the light was come, they only mocked his
fears.

A RHAPSODY

I

THERE is a God most surely in the heavens,
Who smileth always, though His face be hid.
And young Joy cometh as His messenger
Upon the earth, like to a rushing wind,
Scattering the dead leaves of our discontent
Ere yet we see him. Then he setteth us
Upon his back and fieth to God's presence,
Till on our faces there is seen the light
Which streameth from his brows for evermore.

II

There is a God. Ay, by this breath of dawn,
I swear there is a God, even here on earth.
And see, a blush upon the edge of heaven,
Bearing me witness! There is something changed
About these woods since yesterday; a look
Of shame on Nature's face; a consciousness
In the bent flowers; a troubled tell-tale gleam
On the lake's brim. This morning, as I passed
Over the lawn, there was an instant's hush
Among the trees, and then a whispering
Which woke the birds; and of a sudden, lo!

A RHAPSODY

A thousand voices breathed conspiracy ;
And now a silence. There are listening ears
In all these bushes waiting till I speak.

III

There is a God. I swear it on the truth
Of my new joy, which is not of the earth,
But grows within my hand, a thing of strength,
A wonder to the earth, whose old worn heart
Has long been joyless. Listen, while I speak,
Ye autumn woods. Ye ancient forest trees,
Lend me your ears. Thou little brook, be still
Till I have spoken, for I have a tale
For the morning's ear ; and O ! thou Nature's voice,
Be silent this one day and hear of joy
Newer than thine. You friends whom I have loved,
Listen, and stop me not with word or sign
Till I have poured my heart into your ears.
For if you spoke to me I should not hear,
And if you wept with me I should not see,
And if you mocked me I should not suspect,
Being this day the fool of happiness.
And all my blood is full of dancing motes ;
And in my brain are chords of silver tone
Divinely struck to statelier harmonies
Than heaven's own harping ; and my eyes have tears
Which brim and quiver, but they will not fall,
For they are far too happy in my eyes.
Tears,—what of tears ? which are but new delights,
New visions of new joys which none have seen,
And which are mine. Such only Solomon
Saw when he sat upon his ivory throne,
And lo ! the pageantry of Sheba came,

A RHAPSODY

Bearing its queen upon a sandal bed,
And laid her at his feet. These even I,
Who live and speak with you, have seen to-night.

IV

And mark, how simply wonders come about
And take our hearts by storm, as in the night
Fate creeps upon a city. I had fled
Four months ago, when July nights were young,
Out in the wilderness to be alone.
Four months, four summer months among the hills,
So far from my old life I had forgot
All to my name. None knew me but my dog,
And he was secret. Thus, in pedlar's guise,
With pack and staff, and bartering such small wares
Of pills and ointments as the vulgar love,
And gathering simples, I had worked my way
Through every valley of the Candriote hills.
Four summer months of silence, and the balm
Of the green pastures where the cattle go
In the long droughts; among the giant rocks
Which are the walls of heaven, the ibex' home;
Among the dells where the green lizards lurk,
Waiting for sunrise. Oh, I knew them all,
The speckled birds which live among the stones.
I made new friendship with each grass and weed,
Each moss and lichen. Every flower became
Like a familiar face, and as I passed
The harebell nodded to me from her stem,
The gentian opened wide her sapphire eyes,
And the Alp roses blushed. But, most of all
The butterflies were mine. I marked each one,
As he came sailing down upon the wind,

A RHAPSODY

A furlong off. The Argus looked at me
Out of his hundred eyes and did not move.
I could have counted you the purple spots
On great Apollo's wings. The shepherds came,
And brought their sick, that I might heal their woes
With my poor knowledge, and I learned in turn
Much weather wisdom, and some wisdom too
Fresh from their human hearts 'twas wealth to know.
And so I lived and dreamed and drank the wind
Which snows had cooled; and often I have stood
On some tall pinnacle above the plain,
And watched the clouds come flying on the breeze
To tear their fleeces on the jagged rocks,
Until they caught and folded me about
In their damp garments; and, when these were gone,
And the sun broke through the rain, my very soul
Laughed with the sun, washed white as a christened
child,
And all was clean forgotten but its joy.
Such life was mine the short sweet summer through;
But when the August days were fled away
And nights grew chill, I came to Bannastal
On the Uranian sea, and there my fate
Was waiting for me, though I knew it not.

v

My fate, and what a fate! O Lytton! now,
I see my life transfigured like a seer's.
My eyes are open. I read plain the meaning
Of all that I beheld and heard and knew
Through the past summer, as in words of fire,—
The sadness of my soul, my pilgrimage
Among the hills, each flower upon my way,

A RHAPSODY

The sun, the stars, the passionate face of heaven,
The virtue of the earth, which expectation
Peopled for me with signs and prophecies,—
All, all foretold the coming of a god.
Nay more, each hope, each fancy, each desire,
Each separate thought which I have thought, each
sorrow

Laid on my heart, each unseen accident
Met in my road, each word, each look, each choice,
Each idle dream that I have dreamt in folly,
From my first hour till now, I do acknowledge
As the great forecast of a glorious fate,
Of hope made ecstasy and life made love.

VI

And thus it is I learned the very truth
That God is on this earth. For twenty days
Are come and gone, and twenty nights have been
More sunny than those days, since these things were ;
And I still ride upon the back of Joy,
Which bears me bravely. Still the flowers blow.
St. Martin's summer has brought back the birds
To sing in these old gardens as in June.
—Listen. I hear one like the nightingale,
But sweeter and less sad, and thus she sings :—

I

Oh fly not, Pleasure, pleasant-hearted Pleasure.
Fold me thy wings, I prithee, yet and stay.
For my heart no measure
Knows nor other treasure
To buy a garland for my love to-day.

A RHAPSODY

II

And thou too, Sorrow, tender-hearted Sorrow.
Thou grey-eyed mourner, fly not yet away.
For I fain would borrow
Thy sad weeds to-morrow
To make a mourning for love's yesterday.

III

The voice of Pity, time's divine dear Pity,
Moved me to tears. I dared not say them nay,
But went forth from the city
Making thus my ditty
Of fair love lost for ever and a day.

THE WANDERER'S RETURN

An old heart's mourning is a hideous thing,
And weeds upon an aged weeper cling
Like night upon a grave. The city there,
Gaunt as a woman who has once been fair,
Lay black with winter, and the silent rain
Fell thro' the heavens darkly, like a stain
Upon her face. The dusky houses rose,
Unlovely shapes laid naked on the ooze,
Grimed with long sooty tears. The night fell down
And gathered all the highways in its frown :
This was my home.

I saw men pass and pass
Nor stop to look into a neighbour's face ;
I dared not look in theirs because my eyes
Were faint and travel-jarred and would not rise
From the dull earth, and hunger made them dim,
The hunger of a seven years' angry dream
Of love and peace and home unsatisfied ;
And now my heart, thus grievously denied,
Rose, like a caged bird in the nesting time,
Who beats against the bars that prison him,
In all its greenness of youth's wounds and pain,
And would not cease till these should bleed again.

For I had gone a hunter through the world,
And set my tent in every land and hurled

THE WANDERER'S RETURN

My spears at life because my joys were dead,
And many a fair field of the Earth was red
Where I had passed, and many a wind might tell
Of stricken souls which to my arrows fell.
I would not stop to listen to their cries,
But went my way and thought that I was wise.

A wanderer's life, whether his lone chase be man
Or only those poor outlaws under ban,
The creatures of the field his hand destroys
Through rage of wantonness or need of noise,
Is the fierce solace of its anger given
To a hurt soul which dares not turn to heaven.
With me it was a vengeance of love lost,
A refuge proved for passions tempest tossed,
An unguent for despairs that could not kill.
I wandered in the desert and the hill,
Seeking dry places, and behold my grief
Fled from my footprints and I found relief;
And it had happened to me, as befalls
Men bred in cities who have left their walls
For gain or pleasure, that the wilderness
Grew lastly wearisome : I loved it less.

And once a desperate chase had led me on
To an unknown land when daylight was near done,
And I sat weary by my slaughtered prey
And watched the cranes which northward fled away
Rank upon rank into the depths of air,
And still the horizon, lifeless, vast and bare,
Stretched wide around, and like a vault of dread
The arch of heaven hemmed me overhead,
And the great eye of the dead beast was set
Upon my own. I felt my cheek was wet :
Oh, surely then, for all man's heart be hard,
Though he have taken Nature by the beard,

THE WANDERER'S RETURN

And lived alone as to the manner born ;
And though his limbs be strung with toil, and worn
To all Earth's dangers, yet at such a time
His coward soul will overmaster him,
Saying, " Beware, thou child of Earth, even now
Look at the world, how wide it is, and thou
How small ! And thou hast dared to be alone !"
And, lo, the last long flight of cranes was gone,
And darkness with its folding pity crept
Over the plain. I hid my face and wept,
Till sleep fell on me. But when dawn was come
I turned my steps to what had been my home.

The palace gardens ! I had fled aside
From the gaunt streets in easement of my pride
After the lamps were lit, for to my brain
The tumult and the passers-by were pain :
The gardens where, in those far summer times,
A boy I came to watch the pantomimes
Among a laughing crowd of white-capped *bonnes*
And red-cheeked children and loud country clowns,
Or where along the wall in graver sense,
And screened from winds in their "*petite Provence*,"
With the first chestnut blossoms old men sat
And cheered their melancholy souls with chat,
Thawing like frozen apples in the sun !
The old men and the children all were gone.
The leaves, their canopy, lay torn and dead,
And crushed in spongy heaps beneath my tread,
The fountains recreant to their laughter lay
Murk pools of silence shrouded from the day,
As though no doves had ever at their brink
Stooped in full June to plume themselves and drink ;
Only the trees stood, witness of the past ;
Sad trees, I greeted them. I held them fast

THE WANDERER'S RETURN

Like a friend's hands. They were as changed and bare
As my own life, but calm in the despair
Of their long winter's martyrdom, and I
A very child in my philosophy !
Till I remembered that no spring would come
To mock the winter of my own long doom
With any merriment. And "Trees," I cried,
"Your hearts within are all too greenly dyed
To match with mine." I let their branches go,
And sat upon a bench to feed my woe
With memories long hidden out of mind,
But which trooped back that night and rode the wind.

These wooden benches, what sad ghosts of pleasures
Had used them nightly crouching o'er their treasures,
My own long murdered joys, since there we sat
Blind in our love and insolent to Fate !
Each one a witness proved of our lost vows,
Our prayers, our protests, all our souls' carouse :
Each one inscribed through the unheeding years
With letters of a name I wrote in tears.
'Twas here I saw her first, a pure sweet woman,
Fair as a goddess, but with smile all human,
Her children at her knees, who went and came
At each new wayward impulse of their game,
And she reproving, with her quiet eyes
Veiling the mirth they could not all disguise.
The echo of her voice with its mute thrill
Lived in these glades and stirred my pulses still,
Though I had lived to hear it in what tone
Of passionate grief and souls' disunion.
She stood, a broken lily, by that tree,
Sunlight and shade for ever changingly
Chequering the robe she wore of virgin white,
When first I touched the goal of my delight

THE WANDERER'S RETURN

Her woman's hand, and hid it in my hands.
Here shone the glory of her countenance,
Nobler for tears, when weakness for a space
Held full dominion in that heaven, her face,
And she confessed herself of grief divine,
And love grown young, a vintage of new wine,
And I was crowned her king. O silent trees,
You heard it and you know how to the lees
We drained the cup of life and found it good,
Gathering love's manna for our daily food
In scorn of the vain rest. You heard and knew
What the world only guessed where all was true.
And have you dreamed on in your quiet grove.
While seven years were built against our love !

"Twas on this bench I sat that day of June
Thinking of death a whole sweet afternoon,
Till I was sick of sorrow and my tongue
Weary of its long silence (I was young,
And the birds sang so loud) and when the night
Came, as it now came, and the lamps grew bright
In the long street, lit like a diamond chain,
I rose and said, "I will not bear the pain.
What is my pride worth that for it this smart
Should harrow up the green things of my heart
For twelve importunate hours in such a sort?
And pleasure is so sweet and life so short."
And as a martyr who long time has lain
Frozen in a dungeon, sees amid his pain,
When he has fasted on for many days,
Bright visions of hot feasts and hearths ablaze
With welcome, and who sells his gloomy creed,
And is overcome of pleasure, so my need
Conquered my pride, and I arose and went
Striding, with smiles at my new found intent

THE WANDERER'S RETURN

Down these same gravel alleys to the gate,
And so beyond, like one inebriate,
Thinking the while of the fair baths and food
Set for the renegade, until I stood
Once more before her door I had forsworn ;
I did not stop to question thoughts forlorn,
But knocked as I had knocked a thousand times ;
St. Roch's was ringing its last evening chimes,
And I still thought about the martyr's dream ;
I saw the light within the threshold gleam,
Which opened to me, and the voice I knew
Said, in all sweetness, as the door swung to,
" Come, we are just in time. How fortunate
You, too, like me, have happened to be late."
I swear I said no word of the sad plans
I had plotted on this bench of ignorance :
There have been kings called happy, but not one
As I that night. Ah, God ! to be alone,
Alone, and never more to hear her voice
Calling me back, blest martyr, to my joys !

I sat there grieving in the cold and rain
Until my heart had half forgot its pain,
And when I rose I scarce could guide my feet,
They were so numb, to the unlovely street.
And yet need was my steps should bear me on
To some mad corner of that Babylon :
And I must feel the gnawings of my soul
With broken meat. " The seven years may roll,"
I said, " and men may change and she be dead.
Yet the house stands, God knows how tenanted."

I leaned my head against the colonnade
Which skirts the square. I think I had not prayed

THE WANDERER'S RETURN

Through all those years, but now I said a prayer,
And hope in spite of reason seemed to wear
Green buds upon its branches. Who shall know
If 'twas a vision sent me in my woe
To prove the power of prayer? But, when I turned
And looked across the square, the candles burned
In the old upper windows, and before
A shadow crossed the curtain, and the door
Opened towards me and a voice there cried,
"Come. You are just in time." I put out wide
My arms into the darkness, and I fell.

When I awoke 'twas as one passed from hell,
Who fears and feels no longer. I was tired.
I scarcely cared to know when I inquired
After the house. The girl who held the glass
To my lips (a flower-girl it seemed she was)
Told me that house and square alike were gone,
Swept by new boulevards to oblivion:
Why should I grieve? The new was worth the old.
I listened to the story as 'twas told,
And lingered with her all the evening there,
Because she pitied me and she was fair,
And held me with her hand upon the latch.
"Seven years," I said, "it is a long night's watch,
For any soul alone upon life's way,
And mine is weary at the break of day."

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

I

WHAT has my youth been that I love it thus,
Sad youth, to all but one grown tedious,
Stale as the news which last week wearied us,
Or a tired actor's tale told to an empty house?

II

What did it bring me that I loved it,—even
With joy before it and that dream of Heaven,
Boyhood's first rapture of requited bliss—
What did it give? What ever has it given?

III

Let me recount the value of my days,
Call up each witness, mete out blame and praise,
Set life itself before me as it was,
And—for I love it—list to what it says.

IV

Oh, I will judge it fairly. Each old pleasure
Shared with dead lips shall stand a separate treasure.
Each untold grief, which now seems lesser pain,
Shall here be weighed and argued of at leisure.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

V

I will not mark mere follies. These would make
The count too large and in the telling take
More tears than I can spare from seemlier themes
To cure its laughter when my heart should ache.

VI

Only the griefs which are essential things,
The bitter fruit which all experience brings ;
Nor only of crossed pleasures, but the creed
Men learn who deal with nations and with kings.

VII

All shall be counted fairly, griefs and joys,
Solely distinguishing 'twixt mirth and noise,
The thing which was and that which falsely seemed,
Pleasure and vanity, man's bliss and boy's.

VIII

So I shall learn the reason of my trust
In this poor life, these particles of dust
Made sentient for a little while with tears,
Till the great "may-be" ends for me in "must."

IX

My childhood ? Ah, my childhood ! What of it
Stripped of all fancy, bare of all conceit ?
Where is the infancy the poets sang ?
Which was the true and which the counterfeit ?

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

x

I see it now, alas! with eyes unsealed,
That age of innocence too well revealed.
The flowers I gathered—for I gathered flowers—
Were not more vain than I in that far field.

xi

Self was my god, the self I most despise,
Blind in its joys and swine-like gluttonies,
The rule of the brute beast that in us is,
Its heaven a kitchen and a gorge its prize.

xii

No other pleasures knew I but of sense,
No other loves but lusts without pretence.
Oh, childhood is but Nature unredeemed,
Blind in desire, unshamed in ignorance.

xiii

I was all vanity and greed, my hand
Uncaring as a panther's whom it pained,
My nurse, my sisters, the young birds my prey.
I saw them grieve nor stopped to understand.

xiv

My mother loved me. Did I love her? Yes,
When I had need of her to sooth distress
Or serve my wants. But when the need was by,
Others were there more dear in idleness.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

XV

These coaxed and flattered me. Their wit afforded
Edge to my wit, and I would strut and lord it
Among them a young god—for god I seemed—
Or goose—for goose I was—they still *encored* it.

XVI

Alas, poor mother! What a love was yours!
How little profit of it all endures!
What wasted vigils, what ill-omened prayers;
What thankless thanks for what disastrous cures!

XVII

Why did you bind yourself in such harsh fetter,
To serve a heart so hard? It had been better
Surely to take your rest through those long nights,
Than watching on to leave me thus your debtor.

XVIII

I heard but heeded not her warning voice;
I grudged her face its sadness in my joys,
And when she looked at me I did not guess
The secret of her sorrow and my loss.

XIX

They told me she was dying, but my eyes
Brimmed not with tears. I hardly felt surprise,
Nay, rather anger at their trouble when
I asked them "what it was one does who dies."

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

xx

She threw her weak arms round me, and my face
Pressed to her own in one supreme embrace ;
I felt her tears upon my cheeks all wet,
And I was carried frightened from the place.

xxi

I lost her thus who was indeed my all,
Lost her with scarce a pang whom now I call
Aloud to in the night a grieving man,
Hoar in his sins, and only clasp the wall.

xxii

This the beginning. Next my boyhood came,
Childhood embittered, its brute joys the same,
Only in place of kindness cruelty,
For courage fear, and for vain-glory shame.

xxiii

Here now was none to flatter or to sue.
My lords were of the many, I the few ;
These gave command nor heeded my vain prayers,
It was their will, not mine, my hands must do.

xxiv

I was their slave, my body was the prey
Of their rude sports, more savage still than they,
My every sense the pastime of their whim,
My soul a hunted thing by night and day.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

XXV

Pain was my portion, hunger, wakefulness,
And cold more bitter still, and that distress
Which is unnamed of tears that dare not fall,
When the weak body grieves and none may guess.

XXVI

There was no place where I might lay my head,
No refuge from the world which was my dread,
No shrine inviolate for me from my foes,
No corner quite my own, not even my bed.

XXVII

I would have changed then with the meanest thing
Which has its home in the free fields in Spring,
And makes its lair in the Earth's secret dells,
Or hides in her dark womb by burrowing.

XXVIII

I used to gaze into the depths of Earth,
And watch the worms and beetles that have birth
Under the stones secure from outer ills,
And envy them their loneliness in mirth.

XXIX

One treasure had I, one thing that I loved,
A snail with shell most delicately grooved,
And a mute patient face which seemed to see,
And horns which moved towards me as I moved.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

xxx

It was like me a creature full of fear,
But happier far for its strong household gear,
The living fortress on its back wherein
Its griefs could shrink away and disappear.

xxxI

I kept it in a nest, the hollow bole
Of a dead elm, and for its daily dole,
And my own comfort in its luckier state,
Brought it a lettuce I in secret stole.

xxxII

It waited for my coming each new noon,
When from my fellows I could steal so soon,
And there I fed it and arranged its cell,
All through a single happy month of June.

xxxIII

And then—ah, then—who even now shall tell,
The terror of that moment, when with yell
Of triumph on their prize they broke and me,
And crushed it 'neath their heels, those hounds of hell!

xxxIV

Even yet the thought of it makes my blood rush
Back to my temples with an angry flush ;
And for an instant, if Man's race could be
Crushed with it, God forgive me, I would crush.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

XXXV

Ay, God forgive me ! 'Tis an evil thought,
And thus it is that wrong on wrong is wrought,
Vengeance on vengeance by a single deed
Of violent ill or idleness untaught.

XXXVI

Nay, rather let me love. I will not be
Partner with Man even thus in cruelty
For one least instant, though the prize should stand,
Hate slain for ever and the Nations free.

XXXVII

Thus for four years I lived of slaves the slave,
Too weak to fight, too beaten to be brave.
Who mocks at impotence and coward fear,
Knows little of the pangs mute creatures have.

XXXVIII

Yet wherefore grieve? Perhaps of all my days
This is the thing I mostly need to praise,
My chiefest treasure to have suffered wrong,
For God is cunning in His works and ways.

XXXIX

The sense of justice which He gives to Man
Is his own suffering, and His pity's plan
Man's own great need of pity which brims o'er
In alms to Africa and Hindostan.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

XL

And he who has not suffered nothing knows ;
Therefore I chide not at these ancient woes,
 But keep them as a lesson to my pride,
Lest I should smite the meanest of my foes.

XLI

And it is ended. Kindly Death drew near
And warned them from me with his face of fear.
 I did not fear him, but the rest stood awed,
As at the frown of some dread minister.

XLII

I passed out of their sight, one living still,
But dead to sense who knows not good or ill.
 Their blessings were the last thing that I heard
In that dark house. I wish them only well.

XLIII

What next befell me was as some have found,
Peace to their wounds upon a battle ground,
 Who sleep through days of pain and nights of fear,
Conscious of nothing but their dream profound.

XLIV

My dream was of a convent with smooth floors,
And whitewashed walls, a place of corridors,
 Where the wind blew in summer all day long,
And a shut garden filled with altar flowers.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

XLV

Here lived in piety a score of men,
Who, having found the world a place of pain,
Or fearing it e'er yet they knew it well,
Sought in God's service their eternal gain.

XLVI

With these it was my privilege to be
The pensioner of their great pity's fee,
Nor favoured less for my dim soul's dark ways,
Awhile 'twixt boyhood and maturity.

XLVII

My sorrow to their zeal was fruitful soil,
My wounds their pride as needing wine and oil ;
All knowledge had they to redeem and save,
Mirth, silence, prayer, and that best opiate, toil.

XLVIII

The garden was my task. I learned to dig,
To nail the fruit-trees, pear, and peach, and fig ;
To trim the grass plots and the box make good,
And keep the gravel smooth from leaf or twig.

XLIX

Dear blessed garden ! In this night of days
I see it still with its fair formal face,
Where even the flowers looked prim, as who should
ask
Pardon for beauty in so pure a place.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

L

This for the summer. But when winter fell,
A gentler service called me from my cell,
As suited to the frailty of my needs,
To serve the mass and ring the chapel bell.

LI

Mine was the sacristy, the care of copes,
Albs, censers, pyxes, gifts of kings and popes,
Of lace and linen and the lamps which hung
For ever lit with oil of human hopes.

LII

There on the altar steps, as one at home,
I hourly knelt the servant of old Rome,
And learned her ritual, and assuaged my soul
With the high lessons of her martyrdom.

LIII

Not seldom in those hours the dream was mine
Of voices speaking and a call divine.
God in all ages thus has shown to men
His secret will, and I too sought a sign.

LIV

The voice that called me was a voice of good.
It spoke of feasts less vain than the world's food,
And showed me my place set a guest for aye
Of heavenly things in that calm brotherhood.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

LV

Why did I shrink ? What profit to my soul
Has the world proved that I must yield it toll ?
What its ambitions that for these my zeal
Turned backward then from its eternal goal ?

LVI

Yet thus it is. Our fallen human blood
Is ever a mixed stream 'twixt bad and good ;
And mine, perhaps, worse mingled than the rest,
Flowed in a baser, a more prurient flood.

LVII

And so it might not be. There came a day
When I must grasp my fate and choose my way,
And when my will was weaker than a child's,
And pride stood in rebellion and said nay.

LVIII

There in the garden, while the thrushes sang,
I listened to his prayer with a mute pang.
That man of God who argued with my soul,
And still the vesper chorus rang and rang.

LIX

Below us a pool lay with depths profound,
And in its face I gazed as if to sound
His reason's meaning, while the rain of grace
Was shed on all things but my heart around.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

LX

"For lo," he said, "thus near us lies the end ;
A step—no more—may mar our lives or mend.
This side a little, and Hell gapes for us ;
On that side Heaven holds out strong hands, a friend.

LXI

"And he who fears is wise. Oh look," he cried,
"Here in this pool lies Death with its arms wide.
Speak. Shall I buy you life at cost of mine ?
Nay ; I would drown, though in my sin I died."

LXII

Thus Moses argued with his people, these
Than I less stubborn and less hard to please.
God on that night spoke loudly to my soul,
And I refused Him—weeping—on my knees.

LXIII

Here my dream ended. From that hidden life
I went out hungry to a world of strife,
The world of pleasure, and with heart keen set
For human joy as having felt the knife.

LXIV

What is the root of pleasure in Man's heart ?
The need to know made practical in part,
The shaping of the thing the soul has dreamed,
In gold or clay, with art or little art.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

LXV

Youth knows not how to fashion its own pleasure ;
It deals with Fortune without scale or measure,
 And so is cheated of the gold life holds,
A treasure house of hope without the treasure.

LXVI

The need is there, as swallows need to fly,
The strength of wing which longs for liberty ;
 The courage of the soul which upward tends,
And the eye's light, a truth which is no lie.

LXVII

Behind us the past sinks, too tedious night,
Whose shadows brighter show the world of light.
 And who shall say that laughter is not good,
When the blood pulses in the veins aright ?

LXVIII

An April morning with the birds awake ;
The sound of waters lapping by a lake ;
 The scent of flowers, the rhyme of dancing feet ;
The breath of midnight with the heart aquake.

LXIX

These are the moods of pleasure. And no less
The soul itself has need of wantonness.
 The thirst of knowledge fired not only Eve,
And youth grieves still to guess and only guess.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

LXX

We ask for wisdom. Knowledge first of all
Demands our vows from her high pedestal.

We wish ourselves in act as wise as gods,
Nor even in age dare quite our oath recall.

LXXI

The truth !—to hold the actual thing and be
Bound by no law but hers and liberty.

Such was my youth's ambition, the fruit fair
And good for food of the forbidden tree.

LXXII

Two things I was resolved my soul should know :
The physical meaning of the Earth below,
With its dumb forces armed for good and ill,
And its blind fires which in their cycles go ;

LXXIII

This, and the power of Love. Here doubly set
The riddle stood which holds life's alphabet.

What of a very truth were God and Man ?
I dared not die till I had answered it.

LXXIV

And first of God. What Quixote on what steed
Of foundered folly urged to headlong speed,

E'er chose his path more madly, or fell down
Proner on life's least lenient stones to bleed ?

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

LXXV

Striding my horse of reason with loose rein,
I tilted at all shadows in disdain.
To each Eternal I my question put,
“What art thou, for Man’s pleasure or his pain?”

LXXVI

The Maker I had worshipped, where was He,
In the Earth’s fields, or the circumfluent sea?
The footsteps of His presence on the wind,
How should I trace them through infinity?

LXXVII

The huge world in its naked shape unclad,
Mocked me with silence, as a thing gone mad.
A brainless virgin, passionless and blind,
Reeling through space, un sentient—yet how sad!

LXXVIII

The stars of heaven! Their voices once went out
Through all a firmament in psalm and shout.
What word have they to-night? Nay, Jesse’s son
Had only mocked in our new world of doubt.

LXXIX

I searched them, and I numbered, and I came
To numbers only, flame evolved of flame,
Orb wheeled on orb, a meaningless machine,
A handless clock without the maker’s name.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

LXXX

Where was my God the Father ? Not in space,
Which needs no god for glory or disgrace,
Being itself eternal. He I sought
Knew not the stars but smiled with human face.

LXXXI

Darkly the night looked at me ; darker still
The inner Earth with its tumultuous will,
Its legion of destroyers and destroyed,
Its law of hunger and the need to kill.

LXXXII

In this too was no god, or—monstrous thought—
A god of endless wrong, of treason wrought
Through countless ages still against the weak.
Out on such truth if this be all it taught !

LXXXIII

Out on such reason ! From that cave of dread
Like one despoiled of thieves I naked fled,
My thirst of knowledge slaked in bitterness,
And Earth's blank riddle all too sternly read.

LXXXIV

What has my youth been that I love it thus ?
The love of woman ? Ah, thou virtuous
Dear face of wisdom which first filled my heaven,
How art thou fled from life's deserted house.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

LXXXV

I see thee pure and noble as a vision,
Rapt in the joy of thy sublime derision
Of all things base, yet tender to the pain
Of him that loved thee spite of love's misprision.

LXXXVI

Joyous thou wert as a Spring morning filled
With mirth of birds which strive and wive and build,
A presence of all pleasure on the Earth
Transformed through thee and with thy laughter
thrilled.

LXXXVII

True were thy eyes and pitiful thy voice,
The colour of thy cheeks how rare a choice,
The smiling of thy lips how strangely dear
When thy wit moved and made our souls rejoice!

LXXXVIII

Few years thou countedst to thy wisdom's score,
But more than mine and than thy pleasure more,
I deemed thee roof and crown of womanhood,
Framed for all fame to blazon and adore.

LXXXIX

Why wert thou fashioned thus for Earth and Man,
If only Heaven was to possess thy plan ?
Why wert thou beautiful as God to me,
If only God should see thee and should scan ?

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

xc

Oh, thou wert cruel in thy ignorance,
Thou first beloved of my time's romance.
The love within thee was a light of death,
Set for a snare and luring to mischance.

xcI

What didst think of him, the boy untried,
To whom thou spakest of heaven as speaks a bride ?
The love of heaven ! Alas ! thou couldst not guess
The fires he nursed or surely thou hadst lied.

xcII

His secret springs of passion had no art,
Nor loosed his tongue to any counterpart
Of mastering words. You neither feared nor knew
The rage of cursing hidden in his heart.

xcIII

If thou hadst seen it, wouldst thou not have said
A soul by Satan tortured and misled ?
Thou didst not guess the truth, that in thy hand
The scourges lay, the pincers, and the lead.

xcIV

Or haply didst thou love me ? Not so heaven
Possessed thee then but sometimes there were given
Glimpses which, to my later eyes of light,
Have shown new worlds as if by lightnings riven.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

xcv

How had it been if I had ventured quite
That first enchanted, unforgotten night,
 When I surprised thee weeping and in fear
Forbore the wrong that should have proved me right?

xcvi

How had it been if youth had been less weak,
And love's mute hand had found the wit to speak.
 If thou hadst been less valiant in thy tears,
And I had touched the heaven which was thy cheek?

xcvii

Would life have been to me what now it is,
A thing of dreams half wise and half unwise,
 A web unpatterned where each idler's hand
Has woven his thoughts, flowers, scrolls, and butter-
flies?

xcviii

Or rather, had it not, redeemed of bliss,
Grasped at new worlds less impotent than this,
 And made of love a heaven? for depths of fate
Lie in the issue of a woman's kiss.

xcix

Alas! it was not, and it may not be
Now, though the sun were melted in the sea,
 And though thou livedst, and though I still should
live,
Searching thy soul through all Eternity.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

c

The ideal love, how fondly it gives place
To loves all real—alas ! and flavourless
The heart in hunger needs its meat to live,
And takes what dole it finds of happiness.

ci

Then are strange spectacles of treason seen,
Earthquakes and tempests and the wars of men,
Shipwrecks of faith, ungodly interludes
And pagan rites to Moloch on the green.

cii

Lust travestied as love goes nightly forth,
Preaching its creed unclean from South to North,
Using the very gestures of true love,
Its words, its prayers, its vows—how little worth !

ciii

Where are ye now, ye poor unfortunates,
Who once my partners were in these mad gaits,
Sad souls of women half unsexed by shame,
In what dire clutches of what felon fates ?

civ

Dark eyed I see her, her who caused my fall,
Nay, caused it not who knew it not at all.
I hear her babble her fool's creed of bliss,
While I lie mute, a swine-like prodigal.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CV

Her chamber redolent of unctuous glooms
Prisons me yet with its profane perfumes,
A cell of follies used and cast aside,
Painted in pleasure's likeness and a tomb's.

CVI

Oh, those dead flowers upon her table set,
How loud they preach to me of wisdom yet,
Poor slaughtered innocents there parched in Hell,
Which Heaven had seen at dawn with dewdrops
wet!

CVII

Littered they lay, those maidenheads of saints,
Mid pots of fard and powder-puffs and paints,
Egregious relics of lost purity
Tortured on wires with all that mars and taints.

CVIII

Beneath, upon the floor her slippers lay
Who was the queen of all that disarray,
Left where she dropped them when she fled the
room
To speed her latest gallant on his way.

CIX

The pictures on the wall—by what strange chance—
Showed sacred scenes of Biblical romance ;
Among them Pilate on his judgment-seat
Washing before the multitude his hands.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CX

Smiling he sat while in reproachful mood
He they led forth to crucifixion stood.
“Innocent am I,” thus the legend ran
Inscribed beneath it, “of this just One’s blood.”

CXI

Innocent! Ah, the sad forgotten thought
Of that mute face my convent dreams had sought.
And while I sighed, behold the arms of sin
In my own arms enlatticed and enwrought.

CXII

A life of pleasure is a misnamed thing,
Soulless at best, an insect on the wing,
But mostly sad with its unconquered griefs,
The noise that frets, the vanities that sting.

CXIII

The weapons of youth’s armoury are these—
The chase, the dance, the gambler’s ecstasies.
Each in its turn I handled with the rest,
And drained my cup of folly to the lees.

CXIV

What days I murdered thus without design,
What nights deflowered in madness and lewd wine!
The ghosts of those lost hours are with me still,
Crying, “Give back my life, and mine, and mine!”

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CXV

Yet was it glorious on the scented morn
To wake the woods with clamouring hound and horn,
 To ride red-coated where the red fox ran,
And shout with those who laughed to see him torn.

CXVI

Glorious to lie 'neath the tall reeds in wait
For the swift fowl at flight returning late,
 And pull them from their path with lightning shot,
The bolt of Jove less certain in its fate.

CXVII

Glorious to battle with the crested wave
For the full nets engulfed in the sea's grave,
 And see the fishes flash entangled there,
With only courage and strong arms to save.

CXVIII

And glorious more, with sword high-poised and still,
To meet the bull's rush with o'ermastering skill,
 And watch the stricken mass in anger die,
Tamed by the potency of human will.

CXIX

All glorious and vain-glorious and most sad,
Because of the dark death their doing made,
 And of the nothingness that swept the track,
Leaving no footprint or of good or bad.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CXX

The light-heeled love of laughter and the dance
Held me, yet held not, in its transient trance.

The hours were few when, fired with love and wine,
I trod the Bacchanalian maze of France.

CXXI

Yet do I mind me of one afternoon
In Meudon wood, when night came all too soon ;
And then again the morning, and unstayed
We pranced our measure out from noon to noon.

CXXII

That day of dancing in my memory stands
A thing apart and almost of romance,
A day of pleasure physical and strong,
Unwearied and unwearying, feet, lips, hands.

CXXIII

The "Coq de Bruyère" was the fortunate sign
Of the lone inn where we had met to dine,
And found a score companions light as we
To turn our rustic hostel to a shrine.

CXXIV

If it still stands, how strangely it must view
This older world with hopes of paler hue !
Or was it youth so painted the grass green,
The apple-blossoms pink, the heavens blue ?

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CXXV

Alas ! I know not, nor remember yet
Her name with whom those foolish hours seemed
 sweet,
 Only that she laughed on and danced with me,
And that my fingers just could span her feet.

CXXVI

How far away ! And Meudon, too, how far !
And all those souls of women lost in care,
 And even fair France herself how merged in pain !
It was the Spring before the Prussian war.

CXXVII

One day, one only day, and then the light
Waned in the place and hid our faces white,
 And, our score paid, we left the empty room
And met no more on this side of the night.

CXXVIII

Who speaks of play speaks treason to youth's state.
Youth is the heir to passion, love and hate,
 The passion of the body in its strength,
The passion of the soul commensurate.

CXXIX

Nought needs it in its force of whip or goad,
Say rather a strong bridle for the road.
 He who would spur it to a fiercer heat
Is an ill rider whom no fortunes bode.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CXXX

Shame is it that the glory of youth's eyes
Should be lack-lustred with the grape's disguise,
And doubly shame its vast Desires should swoon
In maniac clutchings at a vagrant prize.

CXXXI

Gold is the last least noble stake of life,
When all is gone, friends, fashion, fame, love's strife,
The thing men still can chase when dotage stings
And joy is dead and gout is as the knife.

CXXXII

Youth, seeking gold at Fortune's hand, goes bare
Of its best weapons with the humblest there,
As impotent to win a smile from fate
As the least valiant, the most cursed with care.

CXXXIII

Watch well the doors of Fortune. Who goes in?
The prince, the peasant, the gay child of sin,
The red-cheeked soldier, the mad crook-backed
crone.
Which shall prevail with Fortune? Which shall win?

CXXXIV

Nay, who shall tell? Luck levels all pretence,
Manhood's high pride, youth's first concupiscence.
The arbiter of fame it stands and wit,
The judge supreme of sense and lack of sense.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CXXXV

The gambler's heaven is Youth's untimely Hell.
And I, who dwelt there as lost spirits dwell,
There touched the bottom of the pit. Even yet
I dare not nakedly its secrets tell.

CXXXVI

What saved me from the gulf? All ye who preach
Art the physician and consoling leech
Of fallen souls, if but a single spark
Of genius lives, behold the text you teach.

CXXXVII

In Art's high hall for whoso holds the key
Honour does service on a suppliant knee,
Virtue his handmaid is, to work his will,
And beauty crowns him, be he bond or free.

CXXXVIII

His sad soul's raiment from his shoulders fall,
Light pure is given, and he is clothed withal,
His eye grows single and his madness parts
As once in song the raging mood of Saul.

CXXXIX

What saved me from the gulf? Thrice generous hand,
A king's in gifts, a prophet's in command,
All potent intellect designed to guide,
Transforming grief as with a master's wand!

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CXL

This life, if it be worthy grown, is thine ;
These tears made sweet once bitter with such brine,
This impotence of will to purpose fired,
This death fenced out with mine and countermine.

CXLI

For I insensate had resolved to fly
From life's despairs and sick pride's misery,
A craven braggart to the arms of death,
And die dishonoured as the wretched die.

CXLII

Thou stoodst, how oft, between me and my fate,
Bidding me cheer, or, if I dared not, wait,
From morn to night and then from night to morn,
Pointing to Fame as to an open gate ;

CXLIII

Till Time, the healer, had half closed the wound,
And Spring in the year's mercy came back crowned
With leaves and blossoms, and I could not choose
To lie unknown forgotten underground.

CXLIV

If there be aught of pleasure worth the living
'Tis to be loved when trouble has done grieving,
And the sick soul, resigned to her mute state,
Forgets the pain forgiven and forgiving.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CXLV

With wan eyes set upon life's door ajar
She waits half conscious of the rising star,
 And lo! 'tis Happiness on tip-toe comes
With fruits and flowers and incense from afar.

CXLVI

Scarcely she heeds him as he stops and smiles.
She does not doubt his innocent lips' wiles.
 She lies in weakness wondering and half won,
While beauty cunningly her sense beguiles.

CXLVII

Then at her feet he sets his stores unrolled
Of spice and gums and treasure manifold.
 All kingdoms of the Earth have tribute paid
To heap the myrrh and frankincense and gold.

CXLVIII

These are his gifts, and tenderly he stands
With eyes of reverence and mute folded hands,
 Pleading her grace, and lo! her heaven is filled
With music as of archangelic bands.

CXLIX

What saved me from the gulf? A woman's prayer
Sublimely venturing all a soul might dare,
 A saint's high constancy outwitting Fate
And dowered with love supreme in its despair.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CL

I had done naught to merit such high lot,
Given naught in hostage and adventured naught.
The gift was free as heaven's own copious rains,
And came like these unseeking and unsought.

CLI

O noble heart of woman! On life's sea
Thou sailedst bravely, a proud argosy,
Freighted with wisdom's wealth and ordered well,
Defiant of all storms—since storms must be.

CLII

On thy high way thou passedst pursuant only
Of virtue's purpose and Truth's instinct thronely.
Strength's symbol wert thou, self-contained and
free,
Lone in thy path of good but never lonely.

CLIII

What glory of the morning lit thy shrouds!
What pure thought limned thee white on thunder-
clouds!
I from my shattered raft afar in pain
Kneeled to thy form and prayed across the floods.

CLIV

In godlike patience, to my soul's surprise,
Thou paused and parleyed wise with me unwise.
Ah, dearest soul seraphic! Who shall paint
The heaven revealed of pity in thine eyes?

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CLV

She took me to her riches. All the gladness
Of her great joy she gave to cure my sadness,
All her soul's garment of unearthly hopes
To ease the ache which fructified to madness.

CLVI

She took me to her pleasure, wealth long stored
Of silent thought and fancy in full hoard,
Treasures of wisdom and discerning wit,
And dreams of beauty chaste and unexplored.

CLVII

She took me to her heart,—and what a heart,
Vast as all heaven and love itself and art !
She gave it royally as monarchs give
Who hold back nothing when they give a part.

CLVIII

A king I rose who had knelt down a slave,
A soul new born who only sought a grave,
A victor from the fight whence I had fled,
A hero crowned with bays who was not brave.

CLIX

Blest transformation ! Circe's ancient curse
See here interpreted in plain reverse.
Love, generous love, in me devised a spell
Ennobling all and subtler far than hers.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CLX

Thus was I saved. Yet, mark how hardly Fate
Deals with its victors vanquished soon or late.

The ransomed captive of his chains goes free.
She pines in durance who has paid the debt.

CLXI

Behold this woman of all joy the heir,
Robed in high virtue and worth's worthiest wear,

A saint by saints esteemed, a matron wise
As Rome's Cornelia chastely debonnaire.

CLXII

Behold her touched with my own soul's disease,
Grieving in joy and easeless still in ease,

The gall of sorrow and the thorn of shame
Twined ever in the wreaths love framed to please.

CLXIII

Behold her languishing for honour's loss,
Her pride nailed daily to a nameless cross,

Her vesture sullied with the dust of sin,
Her gold of purity transfused with dross.

CLXIV

The echo of her voice has tones that thrill :
I hear her weeping with a blind wild will.

A name she speaks to the dim night, his name
Her virtue spared not yet remembered still.

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CLXV

“Say, shall I comfort thee?” “O soul of mine,
Thy comfort slays me with its joys like wine.
Thy love is dear to me—then let me go.
Bid me fare forth for aye from thee and thine.”

CLXVI

“Is there no pleasure?” “Pleasure is not sweet
When doors are shut and veiled Man’s mercy-seat.
My heaven thou wert, but heaven itself is pain
When God is dumb and angels turn their feet.”

CLXVII

“Is there no beauty? See, the sun is fair
And the world laughs because the Spring is there.
Hast thou no laughter?” “Ay, I laugh as Eve
Laughed with her lord the night of their despair.”

CLXVIII

“The past is passed.” “Nay, ’tis a ghost that lives.”
“Grief dies.” “We slew it truly and it thrives.
Pain walks behind us like a murdered man
Asking an alms of joy which vainly gives.

CLXIX

“Give me thy tears: their bitterness is true.
Give me thy patience: it is all my due.
Give me thy silence, if thou wilt thy scorn,
But spare thy kisses, for they pierce me through.”

QUATRAINS OF YOUTH

CLXX

I saw her perish, not at once by death,
Which has an edge of mercy in its sheath.
 No bodily pleadings heralded decay ;
No violence of pity stopped her breath.

CLXXI

Only the eternal part which was her mind
Had withered there as by a breath unkind.
 Only the reason of her eyes was mute ;
Their meaning vanished, leaving naught behind.

CLXXII

“No bells shall ring my burial hour,” she said:
“No prayers be sung, no requiem for the dead.
 Only the wind shall chaunt in its wild way,
And be thou there to lay flowers on my head.”

CLXXIII

I laid them on her grave. Alas ! dear heart,
What love can follow thee where now thou art ?
 Sleep on. My youth sleeps with thee—and the
 rest
Would but disturb. We are too far apart.

*

*

*

FROM THE ARABIC

I

THE CAMEL-RIDER

I

THERE is no thing in all the world but love,
No jubilant thing of sun or shade worth one sad tear.
Why dost thou ask my lips to fashion songs
Other than this, my song of love to thee ?

II

See where I lie and pluck the thorns of grief,
Dust on my head and fire, as one who mourns his slain.
Are they not slain, my treasures of dear peace ?
This their red burial is, sand heaped on sand.

III

Here came I in the morning of my joys.
Before the dawn was born, through the dark downs I rode.
The low stars led me on as with a voice,
Stars of the scorpion's tail in the deep south.

FROM THE ARABIC

IV

Sighing I came, and scattering wide the sand.
No need had I to urge her speed with hand or heel,
The creature I bestrode. She knew my haste,
And knew the road I sought, the road to thee.

V

Jangling her bells aloud in wantonness,
And sighing soft, she too, her sighs to my soul's sighs;
Behind us the wind followed thick with scents
Of incense blossoms and the dews of night.

VI

The thorn trees caught at us with their crook'd hands;
The hills in blackness hemmed us in and hid the road;
The spectres of the desert howled and warned;
Heeded nothing of their words of woe.

VII

Thus till the dawn I sped in my desire,
Reasting the ridges, slope on slope, till morning broke;
And lo! the sun revealed to me no sign,
And lo! the day was widowed of my hope.

VIII

Where are the tents of pleasure and dear love,
Set in the Vale of Thyme, where winds in Spring are
The highways of the valley, where they stood
Strong in their flocks, are there. But where are they?

FROM THE ARABIC

IX

The plain was dumb, as emptied of all voice ;
No bleat of herds, no camels roaring far below
Told of their presence in the pastures void,
Of the waste places which had been their homes.

X

I climbed down from my watch-tower of the rocks,
To where the tamarisks grow, and the dwarf palms,
alarmed.
I called them with my voice, as the deer calls,
Whose young the wolves have hunted from their place.

XI

I sought them in the foldings of the hill,
In the deep hollows shut with rocks, where no winds blow !
I sought their footstep under the tall cliffs,
Shut from the storms, where the first lambs are born,

XII

The tamarisk boughs had blossomed in the night,
And the white broom which bees had found, the wild bees'
brood.
But no dear signal told me of their life,
No spray was torn in all that world of flowers.

XIII

Where are the tents of pleasure and dear love,
For which my soul took ease for its delight in Spring,
The black tents of her people beautiful
Beyond the beauty of the sons of kings ?

FROM THE ARABIC

XIV

The wind of war has swept them from their place,
Scattering them wide as quails, whom the hawk's hate
pursues ;
The terror of the sword importunate
Was at their backs, nor spared them as they flew.

XV

The summer wind has passed upon their fields ;
The rain has purged their hearth-stones, and made smooth
their floors ;
Low in the valley lie their broken spears,
And the white bones which are their tale forlorn.

XVI

Where are the sons of Saba in the South,
The men of mirth and pride to whom my songs were sung,
The kinsmen of her soul who is my soul,
The brethren of her beauty whom I love ?

XVII

She mounted her tall camel in the waste,
Loading it high for flight with her most precious things ;
She went forth weeping in the wilderness,
Alone with fear on that far night of ill.

XVIII

She fled mistrusting, as the wild roe flees,
Turning her eyes behind her, while fear fled before ;
No other refuge knew she than her speed,
And the black land that lies where night is born.

FROM THE ARABIC

XIX

Under what canopy of sulphurous heaven,
Dark with the thunderclouds unloosing their mad tongues,
Didst thou lie down aweary of thy burden,
In that dread place of silence thou hadst won ?

XX

Close to what shelter of what naked rocks,
Carved with what names of terror of what kings of old,
Near to what monstrous shapes unmerciful,
Watching thy death, didst thou give up thy soul ?

XXI

Or dost thou live by some forgotten well,
Waiting thy day of ransom to return and smile,
As the birds come when Spring is in the heaven,
And dost thou watch me near while I am blind ?

XXII

Blind in my tears, because I only weep,
Kindling my soul to fire because I mourn my slain,
My kindred slain, and thee, and my dear peace,
Making their burial thus, sand heaped on sand.

XXIII

For see, there nothing is in all the world
But only love worth any strife or song or tear.
Ask me not then to sing or fashion songs
Other than this, my song of love to thee.

II

THE DESOLATE CITY

I

DARK to me is the earth. Dark to me are the heavens.
Where is she that I loved, the woman with eyes like stars ?
Desolate are the streets. Desolate is the city,
A city taken by storm, where none are left but the slain.

II

Sadly I rose at dawn, undid the latch of my shutters,
Thinking to let in light, but I only let in love.
Birds in the boughs were awake; I listened to their
chaunting ;
Each one sang to his love ; only I was alone.

III

This, I said in my heart, is the hour of life and of pleasure,
Now each creature on earth has his joy, and lives in the sun,
Each in another's eyes finds light, the light of compassion,
This is the moment of pity, this is the moment of love.

IV

Speak, O desolate city! Speak, O silence in sadness !
Where is she that I loved in my strength, that spoke to
my soul ?
Where are those passionate eyes that appealed to my eyes
in passion ?
Where is the mouth that kissed me, the breast I laid to
my own ?

FROM THE ARABIC

v

Speak, thou soul of my soul, for rage in my heart is
kindled.

Tell me, where didst thou flee on the day of destruction
and fear?

See, my arms still enfold thee, enfolding thus all heaven,
See, my desire is fulfilled in thee, for it fills the earth.

vi

Thus in my grief I lamented. Then turned I from the
window,

Turned to the stair, and the open door, and the empty
street,

Crying aloud in my grief, for there was none to chide me,
None to mock at my weakness, none to behold my tears.

vii

Groping I went, as blind. I sought her house, my be-
loved's.

There I stopped at the silent door, and listened and
tried the latch.

Love, I cried, dost thou slumber? This is no hour for
slumber,

This is the hour of love, and love I bring in my hand.

viii

I knew the house, with its windows barred, and its leafless
fig-tree,

Climbing round by the doorstep the only one in the
street;

I knew where my hope had climbed to its goal and there
encircled

All that those desolate walls once held, my beloved's
heart.

FROM THE ARABIC

IX

There in my grief she consoled me. She loved me when I
loved not.

She put her hand in my hand, and set her lips to my
lips.

She told me all her pain and showed me all her trouble.

I, like a fool, scarce heard, hardly returned her kiss.

X

Love, thy eyes were like torches. They changed as I beheld
them.

Love, thy lips were like gems, the seal thou settest on
my life.

Love, if I loved not then, behold this hour thy vengeance ;

This is the fruit of thy love and thee, the unwise grown
wise.

XI

Weeping strangled my voice. I called out, but none
answered ;

Blindly the windows gazed back at me, dumbly the door ;
She whom I love, who loved me, looked not on my yearning,

Gave me no more her hands to kiss, showed me no more
her soul.

XII

Therefore the earth is dark to me, the sunlight blackness,

Therefore I go in tears and alone, by night and day ;

Therefore I find no love in heaven, no light, no beauty,

A heaven taken by storm, where none are left but the
slain !

III

THE GRIEF OF LOVE

I

Love, I am sick for thee, sick with an absolute grief,
Sick with the thought of thy eyes and lips and bosom
All the beauty I saw, I see to my hurt revealed.
All that I felt I feel to-day for my pain and sorrow.

II

Love, I would fain forget thee, hide thee in deeper night,
Shut thee where no thought is, in the grave with tears.
Love, I would turn my face to the wall and, if needs be,
die ;
Death less cruel were than thy eyes which have blinded
me.

III

Since thou art gone from me, glory is gone from my life ;
Dumb are the woods and streams, and dumb the voice
of my soul ;
Dead are the flowers we loved, blackened and sere with
blight,
Earth is frost-bound under my foot where our footsteps
trod.

FROM THE ARABIC

IV

Give me back for my sorrow the days of senseless peace,
Days when I thought not of thee, or thought in wisdom ;
Let me see thee once more as thou to my folly wert,
A woman senseless as sounding brass or as tinkling
cymbal.

V

Why didst thou show me thy heart, which I thought not
of ?
Why didst thou bare me thy soul, who to me wert soul-
less ?
Why didst thou kiss my mouth, when my mouth did mock ?
Why didst thou speak to my lips of love, e'er my lips had
spoken ?

VI

Love, thou hast made me thine, thine, and in my despite,
Laying thy hand on my heart in the soft Spring weather
Love, thou hast bought my soul at a price, the price o:
thine,
Never again to mock at love, ah, never, never.

IV

A LOVE SECRET

I

Love has its secrets, joy has its revealings :
How shall I speak of that which love has hid ?
If my beloved shall return to greet me,
Deeds shall be done for her none ever did.

II

My beloved loved me. How shall I reveal it ?
We were alone that morning in the street.
She looked down at the ground, and blushed, and trembled.
She stopped me with her eyes when these did meet.

III

“What wouldst thou, sweet one? What wouldst thou
with sorrow,
Thou, the new morning star with me, the night ?
What are those flowers thou holdest to thy bosom ?
What are the thoughts thou hidest from my sight ?”

IV

“Thine are these flowers,” she said, “these foolish roses,
And thine the thoughts, if thus it be thy will.
I hold them close for fear that thou shouldst mock me,
I hold them to my heart for fear of ill.”

FROM THE ARABIC

v

“Nay, what of ill? ’Tis only age is evil,
Only forgetfulness and grief and pain;
What dost thou know of grief, that thou shouldst fear it?
Mine is the grief who cannot love again.”

vi

She raised her eyes, she looked at me in wonder,
“The ache is here,” she said, “by night and day;
I cannot teach my heart to bear its burden,
I cannot turn my silence from its way.”

vii

“Speak to me, child. I am thy wise physician;
A man acquainted with all grief can teach;
There is no sorrow but has joy for sister,
No silence but finds counterpart in speech.”

viii

My beloved laughed. She saw through my dissembling;
She held to me her hand, that I might kiss
The inside of her hand. ’Twas like a petal
Of her own roses, but more dear than this.

ix

I felt its pulses, like a bird in prison;
“Sweet child,” I said, “what wouldst thou I should prove?
I cannot make thee wiser than thy wisdom,
Who knowest all things since thou knowest love.”

280

FROM THE ARABIC

X

How shall I tell it? How shall I reveal it?
I led her by the hand, as thus I said,
Back from the street to where it stood, my dwelling,
And closed the door on where it stood, my bed.

XI

Her laughter stopped. "Nay, use not thou unkindly,
Thine is the hand to deal or spare the blame;
I dare not be to thee thus uninvited,
Thou dost not know me, hast not learned my name."

XII

How shall I tell it? How shall I reveal it?
Love in that instant found its latest birth,
"Soul of my soul," I cried, "thy name is Pleasure,
The sweetest thing to love on this sad earth."

XIII

I held her in my arms, I pressed her fastly,
"Ah, if thou lovedst me indeed," she cried.
"I love thee, and I love thee," was my answer,
"My sister, my beloved one, my bride!"

XIV

Love has its secrets. Joy has its revealings.
I speak of this which love in vain has hid;
If my beloved shall return to greet me,
Deeds shall be done for her none ever did.





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